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S.H. 1828.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE;

OR,

A GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED.

BY ROBERT PHILIP,

OF MABERLY CHAPEL.

"I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary."—ISAIAH.

LONDON:

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TO

HIS FLOCK

AT

MABERLY CHAPEL,

AND TO

HIS OLD FRIENDS IN LIVERPOOL,

THESE ESSAYS

ARE,

WITH EQUAL AFFECTION, INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE following simple, and almost conversational, Essays, are the substance of actual conversations with the Perplexed. How far they will meet the case of that class at large, the Author does not venture to conjecture; but, as they have been useful to not a few, and as he knows of no *small* Work upon the subject, he has felt it his duty to publish them.

It will be obvious that, in doing so, he is influenced by no other motive but the hope of usefulness to the "lambs" of the Great Shepherd's flock; and if this little Work be honoured by Him, to lead any of them into the "green pastures," and up to the "still waters" of Zion, the Author's object will be gained.

R. P.

Mayfield Terrace, Dalston.

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CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. I.

THE WORK OF THE LAW UPON THE CONSCIENCE.

"*Without the* LAW, *sin is dead.*" This is true, both of the Moral Law of Duty and of the Evangelical Law of Faith: for until their authority and spirituality are understood and felt, we do not understand the evil of sin, nor feel the power of it. Like Paul before his conversion, we are "*alive,* without the law:" not afraid of perishing, nor at all affected by the plagues of our hearts: not seriously displeased with ourselves, nor conscious of the displeasure of God.

It is humiliating to look back on this state of mind. We acted and felt as if there had been no law at all, or as if there had been no more law than we ourselves chose to admit. *We obeyed* no farther than suited our own

inclinations, and no longer than suited our convenience. And yet, awful infatuation! we were neither afraid nor ashamed. Indeed, we never paused to consider seriously the divine law or its sanctions; but judged of *right* and *wrong* by public opinion. The world, not God, was our lawgiver: and accordingly, when we did not incur blame from others, we suspected none from God; and, when any part of our conduct was condemned by others, we even took for granted that He would judge more charitably and mercifully than our neighbours did. Thus we had scarcely one scriptural idea of the nature or the authority of the Eternal law. Accordingly, whilst thus "without the law," or without a right sense of its obligations and sanctions, we were quite "alive;" both fearless and gay; neither self-condemned in our own minds, nor aware that God had condemned us. "*Sin*," also, *was* "*dead*," whilst we were thus ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of the Divine law. Not, indeed, *that sin itself* was dead in our hearts: far *from it! But* such were our slight views of

the evil of sin, that it might have been dead, for any uneasiness or alarm it occasioned within us. It did not pain our hearts nor awaken our consciences: it left us at "ease" even "in Zion," and threw no cloud on our spirits or our prospects. We looked as safe and smiling as if we had had no sin, or as if sin involved no punishment. Thus sin was virtually dead, whilst we were inattentive to the demands and denunciations of the Divine law.

Nor was this all. Whilst without scriptural views of the holiness and justness of the law, we were not aware of the power which sin had over us, nor of the strength of our love to it. The evil principles of our hearts did not show all their evil, because we laid no powerful constraint upon them. We had never tried to be very good, and therefore we did not discover that our hearts were very bad. Indeed, we thought better of our *hearts* than of our *lives*. The reason is obvious: we let our hearts have their own way, and allowed them to think and feel as they were inclined. Whatever religious restraints we laid upon our lips or our hands, we imposed none upon

our thoughts: they might range and revel as they chose, if they only kept clear of painful and spiritual subjects. It was, therefore, unlikely—indeed impossible—that our hearts should manifest their enmity to the laws of God, whilst these laws were not applied to them. We did not set them to try to love or fear God: we did not call on them to consider divine and eternal things seriously: we gave them no tasks in devotion, meditation, or self-control. In a word, we did not at all trouble our hearts to be religious; and therefore they did not trouble us by any great opposition to the few religious duties we performed; but let us have our own way, so long as they had *their* own way. And this was one chief reason why our hopes of final safety kept "*alive*," whilst we were without the law: we thought well of our hearts, because they offered no marked opposition to the morals or the religion which we attended to. We attended to no more than was barely sufficient to save us from being *called* irreligious; and the *pride* of the heart *allowed that* degree of duty at all times, and, *on solemn* occasions, a little more: whereas,

if we had tried to set our hearts to the serious consideration and the spiritual discharge of *all* duty, they would have soon shown that they were "hearts of *stone*."

This is indeed a humiliating review of our former habits of acting and judging; but it is well both to take it and to declare it, because the declaration of it may prove useful to others. To ourselves such a retrospect *must* be useful, were it only to enable us to discern the change which has taken place in our views and feelings on this subject.

Now we can truly say, that however we were alive, or sin dead, whilst we did not allow the Law to speak to our consciences,—"*when the commandment came, sin revived, and we died.*" Our ill-grounded hopes of heaven, and our good opinion of our own hearts, fell dead before the scriptural fact, that the Eternal law demands and admits nothing short of *perfect* obedience. The solemn denunciation, "CURSED *is he who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them*," awoke us at once to our guilt and danger; and the declaration, that "by the deeds of the law

no flesh living shall be justified," confounded us. We were thus reduced to a complete dilemma: we saw that we had not kept the law; we felt that we were unable to keep it perfectly; and now we understood that, however well we might keep it in future, the obedience would not atone for our past sins.

We knew not what to do, or what to think, when these solemn facts flashed upon our minds; they were so unlike all our former opinions. We had, indeed, heard and read them, but they had not struck nor startled us before. How could they? We had never seriously weighed their import, nor suspected their application to ourselves: and now that we saw both, it seemed too late to remedy our mistakes. For what could we do with a law which condemned us for past sins, and would not allow present duty to make up for them? We were willing to reform, and to lead a new life; but what was the use of doing so, if the change could not save our souls? Thus there seemed no encouragement to do better, and no benefit to be derived *from it.*

Our case now began to wear a hopeless as-

peot, and would have been held desperate, had not our floating ideas about the mercy of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, kept despair in check. We had never indeed examined, with any care, the nature of divine mercy, or the design of the Saviour's death; but we took for granted that, of course, they were intended to *help* us in some way—and no way, that we knew of then, seemed so likely as their *making up* for our defects, if we did our best to live well in future. Accordingly, under this hope, we began to reform, and tried to repent. We *determined* to confess, very humbly, all our past sins and shortcomings, and to be very devout in our religious duties. But, lo! to our surprise, our hearts would not *fix* nor *feel!* They wandered in prayer, and wavered in all their pious resolutions—they invented excuses for the neglect of some duties, and soon tired of others. This we had not looked for; but, indeed, calculated that our hearts would follow up all the dictates of our consciences. What was to be done? We determined to master their aversion to spiritual things; to force them *to be* penitent and devotional. But all would

not do; they actually became worse, instead of better, the more we tried to subject them to the authority of the Divine law.

Thus it was; "when the commandment came" home to our hearts, demanding sincerity and spirituality, "*sin revived.*"

The principles of the carnal mind flew up in arms, when the *power* of godliness attempted to sit down on the throne of the heart. Then our pride objected to the humility, our sloth to the diligence, our passions, to the self-denial, and our tempers to the strictness, of true holiness: the whole soul shrunk back from the "yoke" of Christ, or tried to break it; and the real, though secret, language of the heart was, "*we will not have this man to reign over us.*" Thus we found that our hearts were as unwilling to obey Christ fully, as they were unable to keep the law perfectly; and therefore the Gospel (as we understood it then, and as some understand it now) left us as *hopeless* as the law had done. And in this way: how could the Saviour be expected to make up the defects *of a heartless piety*? We felt that our religion *was all forced work*, and likely to continue to

be so: and as our opinion of the work of Christ was, that he only helped out those who did their best; of course, we had nothing to expect from him, because nothing to give him, now that our hearts seemed to grow worse instead of better. In a word, we could make nothing of the law or Gospel, but despair or discouragement, in our own case. The law had condemned us, and it seemed inevitable that the Gospel would do so too.

In this condition,—convinced of the importance of personal religion, but feeling it almost impossible to be religious; alive to the value of the soul, but seeing no way of securing its salvation,—many are kept on the rack of suspense, and some on the rack of utter despair. And when such distress of soul falls in, as it frequently does, with a nervous frame of body or a melancholy cast of mind, the suffering is dreadful—indeed *dangerous;* for the tendency of such minds is to indulge hopelessness. Accordingly some do nothing else but "write bitter things" against themselves; setting themselves down as certainly lost beyond redemption, and interpreting all their agonizing

feelings into marks of reprobation. Under this horrid persuasion, they give up prayer entirely, and feel inclined to have done with the word of God, and the house of God, for ever. Indeed, they would do so, were it not that they cannot abandon either for any length of time. There is some fascination about the means of grace, which draws even the hopeless back to them, in spite of despair, sooner or later. They may say that they look for no good from any means, and that they are sure to find none; but still they do "look again" to the temple of God, and cannot tear themselves finally away from it, nor utterly forget that salvation which seems lost to them. The truth is, despair is not *natural* to the human mind; and therefore, although *fits* of it may be indulged frequently, the intervals of it are often employed in re-examining the grounds of hope, and admitting a "may-be," or "peradventure," of salvation. The question, "WHO CAN TELL?" occasionally leads away the thoughts from the dark side to the *bright side of* it, and fixes them there long enough *to* brighten them a little. And although

it seems, to the soul, almost sinful to admit the faintest ray of hope in its own case, and almost a duty to banish it at once; still it is admitted and retained from time to time, until it gradually leads to the resolution of inquiring more fully into the way of salvation.

Now, when this is the case, and the mind is willing to examine the matter calmly and deliberately, it is well to begin with the example of Paul; for God showed mercy to him, that he might show in him "a pattern of all long-suffering to them who should afterwards believe." Besides, as the LAW has had the same effect on you which it had on Paul, it certainly is not impossible that the GOSPEL should have the same effect on you that it had on him. Now, you can truly say with him in the former case, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Yes; you are sure that you are dead to all hope of being saved by the law now, and that your hearts are far worse than you could have imagined them to be. *Well;* how did Paul act and judge, *when by the law he became dead to the law?*

The shock which thus shook his self-righteousness to death, must, you are aware, have been tremendous! Accordingly "*he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*" But he PRAYED! Yes: neither his guilt nor his misery led him to restrain prayer before God; nor did they prevent him from believing the Gospel, when it was preached unto him by Ananias. He gave "all acceptation" to the "saying," as soon as he knew it to be "a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Although he felt himself to be the "chief" of sinners, he did not hesitate to believe in Christ for his own salvation. He believed on Christ, that he might be justified by the faith of Christ: and being justified by faith, he had peace with God. Now this was acting wisely; and thus should all act, whose hopes of salvation by the *works* of the law, have been slain by the *curse* of the law.

If, however, Paul's case be thought too peculiar to argue from,—one thing is certain; we *have the same* Gospel, in the Scriptures, which [redacted] *his* mind, and became the power of

God unto his salvation. Nor is this all: we have also the *command* of God to believe it for our own salvation; and his express assurance, that, believing, it *will* save us. If, then, all our old hopes are crushed to death by the law, why not embrace the new and better hopes which this glorious Gospel sets before us?

"Why not?" some are ready to say; "they are not intended for me: they belong to the penitent; and my heart is hard!—they belong to the humble; and my heart is proud!—they belong to the believing; and I cannot believe!"

Cannot believe! Why? WHAT is it that you cannot believe? Let us see what it really is; and why you cannot believe it: for it may be that it is something not *necessary* to be believed at present; yea, it may be something which it is not *your duty* to believe just now. Do not, therefore, fly off from the Gospel by a hasty conclusion that you *cannot* believe it: you do not seem to *understand it* yet; and, therefore, the difficulty of believing

it may not be so great as you imagine—at least, not of the same kind as you suppose.

What, then, is it that you cannot believe? Yes! *what* is it? For there is reason to suspect that it is either something which it is not necessary to *begin* with; or something which ought not to be believed until "the truth" is believed, with which God has graciously connected the promise of salvation.

The answers to these pointed questions will, of course, vary according to the degree in which those who are interested in them are acquainted with the current opinions and perplexities of serious people. Hence some will say, "Ah! but I cannot believe that Christ died for *me*." Now, be not startled when I say, "No wonder! for how could you believe what is not *revealed*?" And it is *not* revealed that he died for you individually. What is revealed is, that he died for sinners; and *that* you do not disbelieve. But you say, "As I cannot regard myself as one of the sinners for whom Christ died, my believing that he *died for sinners* can do me no good." Why

not? Who told you that the belief of this truth could do you no good? Whoever told you so, the Scriptures did not. They say (whatever you think), that whosoever believeth Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and the only Saviour, shall never perish, but have eternal life: yea, they warrant every one who cordially believes these facts concerning Christ, to believe also that Christ loved *him*, and gave himself for him.

This meets your case, if you understood it: but you are prepared to start objections which will prove that you do not understand it clearly yet. "Why," you say, "if merely believing that Christ is the Son of God, and the only Saviour, were enough to warrant me to regard myself as a believer, it would follow that I was one even whilst I was *careless*; for even then I believed all this." Not exactly; for you could not have continued careless, if you had really believed it all. However, if you will call your former *opinion* of Christ, believing; it was certainly not believing because God had spoken: for it is evident, from your own confessions, that, whilst you were

careless, you did not examine the law or the Gospel. If, therefore, your opinions of the person and work of Christ happened to be, upon the whole, scriptural, they were so without your knowledge; for if you never sat down to form them by the word of God, it is not owing to your care that they were at all correct. Besides, you did not believe what you did, on the *Divine* authority; but because others believed it. Be honest: you just believed what you found current in the world; and would have believed what others did, if it had been the very opposite of what it is. Now, however this *falling in* with public opinion may be called believing, it certainly is not believing God; and therefore ought not to be appealed to in reply to the scriptural fact, that the cordial belief of the Divine testimony concerning the person and work of Christ, is saving faith.

Besides, that testimony is revealed, that it may be believed for the *salvation* of the soul; and, for that purpose, you did not, you could *not, believe it,* whilst you were careless. *How could you?* Whilst you were without

the law in your conscience, your hopes were alive *without* the Gospel. You felt in no danger of perishing: you took for granted that you were sure of salvation at last, by some means. Whatever, therefore, you believed about Christ then, it was not for salvation. Accordingly, you never thought so, nor at all imagined that your opinions about the Saviour had any connexion with your supposed safety. What you relied on then, was the good you were doing, or intended to do; and not anything that Christ had done. Indeed, even now you do not see much beneficial connexion between *believing* and salvation,—I mean, you are quite at a loss to comprehend how the belief of the Gospel can secure an interest in the salvation of God. On all these accounts, therefore, it is wrong, and can only increase your perplexity, to call your former opinions about Christ, belief. They were like your former opinions about the law—too vague and superficial to affect your heart.

But now, your belief of the Divine law will enable you to understand what it is to believe *the Gospel* aright, and to see how faith in Christ

brings both hope and holiness into the mind. You know and feel that you now believe the law of God: of that you have no doubt; and you are equally convinced that you neither believed nor understood it, whilst you were careless. And were any one to tell you now, that he had often heard you call it a *holy* and *just* law, long before you began to think seriously; and were he to argue from this that you believed it then, you would say at once, "Ah! these were mere words of course; for I never weighed their meaning: I just called the law what others called it; and if they understood what they said, I did not. If ever I thought of its holiness, it did not convince me that nothing short of perfect obedience could meet its demands; and whatever I thought of its justice, I did not believe that I was condemned by it. Now, as this is the truth of God concerning his law, it is self-evident that I did not believe, at that time, his testimony on the subject. Indeed, such was my unbelief then, that I was in reality '*without the law.*'"

Thus you would reply to any one who

attempted to confound your former professions with your present belief of the law. Well; it is your present belief of it that creates your present fear of perishing, and keeps up the conviction in your mind that you cannot save yourself. Just because you *believe* that the Eternal law says that you are "condemned already" for what you have done against it, you are afraid; and well you may! But now, the everlasting Gospel declares as plainly what Christ has done to satisfy the law, and to redeem sinners from its curse; and it is just as true that he died to redeem sinners from its curse, as that you are under its curse. Seeing, therefore, you believe the truth which condemns, why not believe the truth which can save you? You need salvation—you wish for it; and would give worlds to obtain eternal redemption from the curse: well; it is offered and promised to you, if you will believe in Christ for it; for "it is of faith, that it might be of grace."

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. II.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT ON THE HEART.

THERE is something so very grand and solemn in the bare idea of being "taught" by the Holy Spirit—"led" by Him—"quickened" by Him—"born again" by Him!—that we can hardly wonder that we should feel both afraid and unable, at first, to believe that any change for the better, which we have experienced under the Gospel, amounts to the work of the Spirit. For to believe this, in our own case, would be to admit that we are really converted to God, and thus already the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. But some, although no longer what they *were* in heart or habits, *are not* prepared to draw this conclusion in *their own case*. Indeed, it is not at once, nor

is it often soon, that any one admits "the full assurance of hope" in his own case. It more frequently happens that those who are most renewed in the spirit of their mind, are most afraid to regard themselves as "born again." It is with the serious, in regard to the regeneration of their souls, as with parents, in regard to the recovery of an only child from a dangerous illness: the physician may pronounce it out of danger, and the symptoms of convalescence may be self-evident to every one but them, and they may not actually dispute the general opinion; but having again and again given up their darling, and felt sure that it could not recover, they are afraid of flattering themselves, and "slow of heart to believe" that any signs, however good, are *proofs* of safety. So it is with those of us who are feelingly alive to the value of our souls, and intent on their salvation: they may be really "passing from death to life;" but we are so afraid of that "death," and so affected by that "life," that we can hardly believe it possible that our souls can escape the former, or obtain the

latter. It seems too good news to be true—too bright a hope to be admitted in our own case. Even when we try to admit it, or venture to whisper to ourselves, that surely a Divine change is taking place within us, the thought creates such a flow of feeling, and flutter of spirits, that we know not what to think: and, being equally afraid of presuming or despairing, we come to no final determination; but wait to see how the good work will go on.

Now, it is well to be cautious upon such a question as "*the renewing of the Holy Ghost,*" for all changes of feeling are not *Divine* changes. Indeed, there is but too much reason to fear that many conclude too hastily in their own favour, and mistake conviction for conversion. But whilst this melancholy fact should teach us prudence, it should not be allowed to divert us from the question of our own regeneration: that point can be ascertained and settled upon scriptural grounds; and therefore it ought no more to be hushed up, than to be *hurried over.* We *are* "born again," or we

are *not*; and, as uncertainty on the point can do no good, it is both our duty and interest to bring the matter to an issue.

Perhaps the best way of doing this is, to reconsider the *necessity* of experiencing the work of the Spirit, in order that we may see clearly the *consequences* of being without the Spirit. "Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." *None of his!* Solemn fact! None of His! Whose, then, is he who has not the Spirit? The law says, "He is my prisoner, and under the curse, whether he believe it or not." Satan says, "He is my victim, whether he feel it or not." The world says, "He is my slave, whether he own it or not." Dreadful condition! If I am not Christ's, I am under the curse of the Eternal law, and in the power of Satan! And I am not Christ's, if I am a *stranger* to the work of the Spirit.

The moment we reflect thus, we feel that the question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost?" is one which should not be left unsettled from year to year, nor even from month to month. *Let us, therefore, put it to ourselves now:*

in connexion with the solemn assurance that we are not Christ's, if we have not experienced something of the work of his Spirit. And if, in this awful connexion, there is some danger of admitting almost any thing to be "the fruits of the Spirit," rather than admit that we are in the power of Satan, let us pray earnestly that we may not be tempted to self-deception: but, at the same time, let not that danger prevent nor intimidate us from going into the question; for, although a solemn one, it is also a *simple* one, if it be kept close to the word of God, and not mixed up with the extravagant or extraneous things, which the fancy of some, and the philosophy of others, have heaped around the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, one thing equally simple and certain is, that the office of the Holy Spirit is to *glorify* the Saviour—to exalt and endear him in our estimation. And whatever be the nature or the degree of the Spirit's operations in the mind, the *design* of them is to render Christ "precious" to the soul. If, therefore, *the Saviour is* become altogether lovely in our *estimation,* and his atonement altogether dear

to us—dear, because of its glory, fulness, freeness, and holy influence,—we are not altogether strangers to the work of the Spirit. Nor, if the Saviour is all and all, in all the hope we cherish, is it of any real consequence whether or not the *way* in which he became so to our souls, is the *same* by which others have been led to love him and rely on him. The real question is not, *How* was I brought to the Saviour? but, Am I brought to him for pardon and sanctification? Some have been brought suddenly, and others gradually, to the Cross for refuge; some have been driven to it by the terrors of the law, and others drawn by the tenderness of the Lord; some were brought very early in life, and others very late: but as they are all brought to rely on Christ for a holy salvation, the difference of the *time* and *manner* of bringing them does not affect their safety. Neither the time nor the manner of bringing sinners to Christ, but their being *brought* to Christ, is the cause of their salvation. Paul's conversion was sudden and miraculous; Timothy's was gradual, and the *effect of* an early religious education: but

Timothy was as safe as Paul, when, like Paul, he laid hold on Christ for eternal life. And if the heart of the Philippian jailor, instead of being as it were *torn* open by terror, had been "opened" as the heart of Lydia was, gently as a rose-bud is unfolded by the sun, the jailor would have found the same welcome at the Cross which he did. In like manner, had Lydia been plunged into despair, as he was at first, it would have availed her nothing, if she had not, like him, fled to Christ. It was, therefore, not that in which their experience *differed*, but that in which it *agreed*—their reliance on Christ alone, which secured their welcome and safety. Paul understood this; and, accordingly, he did not reckon Lydia nor Timothy less truly converted to God, than the jailor or himself; nor did they themselves doubt their own conversion, because the *manner* of it differed from his. In common with all saints, they were glorying only in the cross of Christ; and as they knew that to be the only refuge, and a certain refuge to all who fled to it, they kept to it, without any reference to the way in which *others* were brought to it.

Now, as there was such a marked and immense difference in the manner of their conversion, similar differences may be expected still; and, as in their case, without at all invalidating the reality of the conversion itself. For, in our case also, the real question of experience on this point is—Is Christ become all my salvation? and *not*, Have I felt all the alarm and horror of soul which some have experienced? For, if I have felt that, whatever it was, which has led me to commit my soul to Christ for salvation, I could have done nothing *more* than this, whatever I had felt. They have done nothing more, who have suffered most: and although, of course, the terrors of conscience led them to commit their souls into the hands of Christ with more promptness and solemnity than I did; still, if I did it with *sincerity*, my welcome is equally sure: for, after all, it is the sincerity of faith in Him, and not the strength of *feeling*, which ensures a welcome; and what has been done deliberately, is quite as likely to be sincere as what is done under

alarm. In both cases, it is the sincerity of the application to Christ, which constitutes it *faith* in him.

But some are ready to say, "Alas! I am not sure that I was *sincere* in committing my soul to Christ for salvation." Now, certainly, if you are not sure of your own sincerity, no one else can prove it to you. The utmost that any one can do to help you on this point, is to show you what sincerity is: and really that seems unnecessary. For if you did not *intend* to be insincere when you applied to the Saviour, and if you do not *wish* to be insincere, nor *design* to be so, why should you suspect your sincerity? No one can be a hypocrite, or a pretender, without designing to be so: and therefore, most certainly you are not so, if you dislike to be so.

Thus far I have confined your attention to the first saving result of the work of the Holy Spirit on the mind,—which is, to render the Saviour "precious" in our esteem. Lest, however, this view of his work should be too general, let us examine the Saviour's own

account of the matter. Now, when he gave a detailed account of the work of the Spirit, he said,

' First, "He shall convince the world of sin: of sin, because they believe not on me." Well, what do you think of UNBELIEF? what is your opinion of it?—I do not mean, of its abstract nature; nor do I refer to Infidelity, or its twin "wandering star," Unitarianism; but to the practical unbelief which we manifested whilst we were careless or heartless in religion. Now, what do you think of the time when you lived as if there had been no Saviour, or as if you had been in no want of a Saviour? That was unbelief! What do you think of the temper which inclined you to care nothing about an interest in Christ, and kept you from considering your need of it? That was unbelief! What do you think of those habits and pursuits which were allowed to banish all serious concern about the salvation of your soul? What is your present opinion and feeling in regard to all this unbelieving treatment of the Saviour? Should you like to renew it, and to return to your old state of

mind? No! you are as much shocked at the idea of going back to such feelings and habits, as you are ashamed of having ever felt and acted such a part. Your long and base neglect of the Lamb of God pains and humbles you whenever you think of it;—it was so unreasonable, unwise, and unkind! You both wonder and weep that you could have lived as if Emanuel had never died! This sin sits heavier, at times, on your conscience, than any other; and makes you feel and confess that the Saviour might justly reject you.

Well, if this be your experience on the subject of unbelief, what is all this but *conviction* of the "sin" of unbelief; and that, too, by the work of the Holy Spirit? For what else could have brought you to judge and feel thus? The seeds of these proper sentiments and feelings were not born with you: they must therefore have been *sown* in your hearts; and, as the hand of nature never *contained them*, they must have been sown by *the hand of* the Spirit. For, as Satan would *not have* led you into this new state of mind,

and as the world could not, and you did not lead yourself into it, it must be from God. Yes, from God,—however you may be able to trace its connexion with likely *means*. The means, whatever they were, were but means; and have not produced the same effect upon all who were under the same means as yourself. Besides, if this change in your views and feelings be not, at least, the *beginning* of a divine change, what would be so? It is self-evident, that no change would be saving, which did not include *shame* and *sorrow* for having neglected the Saviour. Not to be convinced of the sin of unbelief, would falsify any and all other appearances of regeneration. If, therefore, you have experienced that, without which all other experience would be useless, it is certain that you are not altogether without the Spirit.

Nor is this all. You may not have observed it, but, on examination, you will find that all your most solid and solemn convictions of the evil and demerit of sin in general, have been *formed or* confirmed by what the Spirit has *shown* you of the Saviour. For it is with the

disease of the soul as with some of the diseases of the body,—it is the *remedy* which discovers its real nature and extent. A man may feel rather unwell, and yet not be alarmed by his symptoms; but if a judicious physician prescribe, after examining them, a remedy which is known to be resorted to only in *desperate* cases, it is the remedy, not the symptoms, as the patient judged of them, that opens his eyes to his danger. He thought himself ill enough to require something; but when he found that the *last* resource of medical skill was the only thing which could save his life, then his disorder appeared to him in a new light, and awoke all his fears. Now, so it is with the soul: it is the remedy for the guilt and defilement of sin, which shows the evil and danger of sin. We may have a general conviction of both, by observing how God abhors sin, and threatens to punish it; and we may see, with some clearness and alarm, that we are in some danger from our sins; and we may feel persuaded that it is necessary to try something to prevent sin from *being our* ruin: but it is not until we see that

"*the blood of Christ*" is the only remedy, that we either understand or feel aright the evil of sin. It is, therefore, chiefly and emphatically by presenting the Lamb slain to the mind, that the Holy Spirit effectually convinces of sin. And this is *conviction!* For, what a sight it gives us of our case and character! Yes; of our *case*, even if our character stand high by comparison. For, as there is only *one* Saviour, and he the incarnate Son of God; and only *one* way of salvation, and it by faith in the blood of that Son; what must sin be, seeing that none but Emanuel could atone for it, and he only by dying for it! Whatever, therefore, I may think of my character, my case is this,—as a sinner, there is nothing between me and hell but the blood of Christ. I may not have done so much evil as some; but as there is no pardon for any sin but through the Cross, I must be lost, in common with the chief of sinners, unless I obtain the remission of my sins through his blood.

This solemn consideration sends through all the soul the solemn conviction, that sin is an evil which we neither understand clearly nor

feel deeply, until we really believe the divine testimony concerning the *person* and *work* of Christ. Whilst we did not believe on him, that we might be justified by him, our views of the evil and danger of sin were slight and partial; but now that we feel that we must look to the Lamb slain for all our salvation, or perish for ever, we *cannot* think lightly of sin. Well, what is this conviction of sin, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind? Yes! the *first* work which he is appointed to by the constitution of the covenant. And yet, even this conviction of sin some are discouraged by, and actually interpret it into a token of Divine *anger*, although it be in itself a token of Divine love, a first-fruit of the Spirit, and a mark of saving *faith* too: for no one could think thus of sin, who did not believe Christ to *be*, and to have *done*, what God testifies.

But I will not hurry on this conclusion too fast. It is desirable to meet distinctly the case of those who, by a strange mistake, imagine that their anguish of soul, on account of sin, is inflicted upon them in anger, and *arises from* God having left them to suffer the

consequences of sin. Some have even regarded this anguish as a foretaste of hell on earth. But consider,—was it in anger that God let loose upon the Jews, at Pentecost, all the stings of conscience, until they were "cut to the heart;" literally "sawn asunder," Was it intended as a forerunner of "the worm that dieth not," when the arrows of the Almighty drank up their spirits? No! they, perhaps, thought so for a time, and during all that part of Peter's sermon which was like the thunder, the earthquake, and the whirlwind at Horeb; but when "the small still voice" of mercy, through the blood of the Saviour whom they had murdered, broke like the music of heaven on their ears,—then they saw, that God wounded only that he might effectually heal them; and cast them down, that he might lift them up for ever. Now, why should it not be so in the case of those who, like them, have been, as it were, "sawn asunder" by self-condemnation? You are not guiltier than the murderers of the Lord of glory, and, therefore, although that fact gives you no *claim* upon mercy, it proves that your guilt,

whatever it is, is not beyond the reach of mercy. Indeed, God could have done nothing better for you, than thus to convict you of sin: for, is it not an *answer* to your own prayers? You have prayed that he would make you sensible of your need of a Saviour, and empty you of self-dependence: and, therefore, whatever you *meant* by this, your convictions of sin form the best answer to your supplications. "The whole" know not "their need of a physician;" and, as God has made you to feel your sickness, the fair interpretation is, that he desires and designs to heal you. Do not, therefore, recklessly or rashly conclude that you are given up, because you are thus given over, for a time, to the terrors of the law, and the stings of the conscience. God is thus, for any thing you know to the contrary, bringing you, "through fire and water, to a wealthy place."

Having thus seen that the first work of the Spirit is to convince of sin, and that the experience we have just reviewed *is* conviction of sin; let us now observe the *second* part of *the work of* the Spirit, and examine what you

have felt of it. "*He shall convince of righteousness, because I go to my father.*" At the first sight of these words, you may be ready to say, "I am sure that I have experienced nothing of this; for I do not know even what it *means*." Perhaps not; and yet you may be familiar with the sentiment itself, although this mode of expressing it be mysterious to you. In fact, you must not be startled by *words*; for, as you have only begun to acquaint yourself with the Scriptures, it is only what might be expected, if you meet with expressions which are not, at once, plain to you. They are, however, quite plain to those who have considered them longer; and the meaning of this one is not unknown to you, if you understand any thing of the Gospel. Accordingly, I am not at all afraid of really discouraging or perplexing you, when I affirm, that if you are not convinced of "righteousness," you "have not the spirit of Christ;" for, are you not fully convinced that Christ could not have gone back to the Father, if his obedience and death had not wrought out and brought in an "everlasting righteousness?" You are

persuaded and sure that God would not have raised him from the dead, nor exalted him to the throne, if he had failed to satisfy law or justice. You therefore regard the resurrection and ascension of the Saviour as *proofs* of the perfection and acceptance of his atonement. Accordingly, were any one to insinuate that he had not magnified the law and satisfied the justice of God, you would appeal with triumph to the fact, that he is now in the midst of the throne as a Lamb that had been slain, and say, that he could not be *there*, if he had not "finished" his mediatorial work here. Well, this is the real and full meaning of the expression, "of righteousness, because I go to my Father." The Saviour's return to the bosom of the Father demonstrates that both his person and work were really what he had declared them to be, divine and atoning. Besides, you are persuaded in your inmost soul that nothing but the righteousness of Christ can justify you before God; and that it *can* do so; and accordingly you have adopted the sentiment of Paul, and "count all things *but loss*, that you may be found, not in your

own righteousness, but in the righteousness" of Christ. Well, this was a proof in Paul's case, that he was convinced "of righteousness" by the Spirit: why then should not a similar sentiment prove the same fact in your case? Paul may have understood it better, and felt it more deeply, than you do at present; but if it has withdrawn all your confidence from your own righteousness, and convinced you that nothing can save you but the righteousness of Christ, this is the *substance* of Paul's experience on the subject.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. III.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

It is as true, that if any man have the Spirit of Christ, *he is* Christ's, as that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:" "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God:"—"and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." It is therefore the *duty* of all who have been "led by the Spirit," to believe this in their *own* case; because they are warranted and welcome to do so, and cannot, until they believe it in their own case, experience "the witness," or "the seal" of the Spirit. Indeed "the fruits of the Spirit" will be both few and imperfect until it is *believed.*

Accordingly, many who can hardly doubt that they have experienced something of the work of the Spirit on their minds, are afraid to regard it as that "good work" which he will "carry on;" because they do not feel the witness of the Spirit, nor the joy of the Holy Ghost. Hence the question which they put to themselves so often—"How can I think that what I have experienced is the saving work of the Spirit, seeing that I feel nothing of the witness, the seal, or the earnest of the Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is *joy* and *peace*, as well as 'temperance and goodness;' and as I have no joy, and but little peace, is it not likely that all the change which I have undergone is merely the effect of the *common* operations of the Spirit, instead of being the effect of his *special* influences?" Thus many of the truly serious argue in their own case.

In order to clear up this matter, the first thing to be settled is, evidently, whether the change of views, feelings, and habits, which you have experienced, is a *divine* change. Now it must be either *divine* or *human*. But if you, as a self-condemned and perishing

sinner, are looking to Christ alone for a holy salvation; if you are willing and desirous to be an entire and eternal debtor to Him, and to be made like him in heart and character, this change from your former state of mind cannot be a human change, because no human means could produce it. Nothing human ever brought any soul to feel that there was nothing between it and perishing, but the blood of Christ. All the tendencies of nature are against this conviction. Wherever, therefore, it is the conviction of the mind, it is the *special* work of the Holy Spirit. Now, if this be the change of mind which you have undergone, it is, unquestionably, a *divine* change; and, as unquestionably, it is your *duty* to believe it to be so. You may say, "I am afraid to conclude that I have been led by the Spirit:" but if you are come to the word of God for counsel—to the Mercy-seat for grace —and to the Cross for all your salvation from sin and hell,—none but the Holy Spirit could have led you there. Those are the grand points to which he leads all whom he quickens. *This is the* very way in which he glorifies the

Saviour. Settle it, therefore, in your mind, from this moment, that your reliance on the Lamb slain for a holy salvation, is absolute *proof* of having been "led" by the Holy Spirit. Or, if you still hesitate to admit this in your own case, do ask yourself, and fairly answer the question, Would any thing be proof, *without* these sentiments and feelings? Do you not see that nothing would amount to a saving change, if this holy reliance on the Saviour were not in it? It is evidently the *chief* thing in regeneration.

Now, if you can neither deny nor doubt that you have been thus led by the Spirit of God, from the love of sin to the love of salvation, it is your immediate *duty*, as well as privilege, to believe that you are Christ's, and a child of God by Jesus Christ. But here again, you fly off from the scriptural conclusion in your own case, and say, "I do not feel myself to be Christ's; I do not feel myself to be a child of God." But, consider: how can you *feel* yourself to be so, while you do not *believe* that you are so? It is irrational to expect that you could feel what you

disbelieve. The feeling of sonship must spring from the belief of your own sonship. No man can have the Spirit of adoption, so as to be fully *aware* of having it, until he believe that he is adopted. Accordingly, it is because believers *are* sons, that God sends forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, "crying, Abba Father." This seal of the Spirit, like the pentecostal gifts of the Spirit, may not be given at once: it may be delayed much longer than the full inspiration of the Apostles was; but the Spirit of adoption will be sent forth, and, whenever it be so, it will be by enabling believers to believe that they "are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

You may not have observed hitherto, that this is the scriptural way of leading believers into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Indeed many seem to look for it in another way, and to expect something like a *revelation* of their own adoption and sonship. They do not see, from the Scriptures, that they are the children of God by faith; and, therefore, they *take for* granted that their knowledge of their

own sonship must come from another quarter—even from the *direct* witness of the Spirit with their spirits, that they are born of God. Accordingly, for this direct witness, they are praying, and waiting, and hoping. Thus many have been judging and acting for years. They know that until they are the children of God, they are not "heirs of God," nor "joint heirs with Christ;" and, as might be expected, they are often cast down because they obtain no clear sense of their own sonship. The witness which they look for, and pray for, does not come; and therefore they imagine that it is withheld in sovereignty, or kept back until they shall acquire more of the *marks* of adoption. And, as they see in themselves many causes why God should *not* answer their prayers for the witness of the Spirit, they try to be content without it for a time.

Now it is no mistake, that the Holy Spirit will *not* witness the sonship of any child of God, who is living in the indulgence of any *known* sin: it is no mistake, that the witness of the Spirit is only given in answer to *prayer:* it is no mistake, that there is a *direct* witness

of the Spirit. *"These are the true sayings of God!"*

But still there is a mistake; and it lies in supposing that the direct witness of the Spirit is something *different* from the direct witness of the Word. It is also a mistake to suppose, that the Holy Spirit either will or can witness to our sonship, before our *own* spirit witness to our having really believed on Christ for salvation. Neither the Spirit of God, nor the Word of God, bears any witness to our adoption, until our own spirit is conscious of *faith* in Christ,

It is by leaving the question of personal faith unsettled, that so many both miss and mistake the witness of the Spirit. They allow it to remain doubtful to themselves, or are afraid to decide, whether their own believing in Christ is *saving* faith or not. They wish it to be so—pray that it may be so—and cherish a faint hope that it may prove to be so in the end; but, at present, they do not venture to regard their own believing as real faith. Their own spirit does not bear them witness *that it is so.* Now, while this continues to be

the case, they must search their own hearts in vain for the witness, or for the peculiar fruits, of the Spirit; for these are peculiar to believers. Until, therefore, your own spirit witness that you are a believer, the Spirit of God will not, cannot, witness that you are a child of God; you must not, therefore, shrink from going fully into the question of your own faith. It is, indeed, a solemn one, and not easily settled, owing to the many controversies which exist on the subject of faith; but still it may be settled, and therefore it should not be left unsettled, especially as you can make no progress towards joy or peace, until you know yourself to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, go into the question calmly and seriously.

Now, your own spirit, although it does not bear you witness that you are really a believer, witnesses *something* on the subject of salvation by the blood of Christ. It bears you witness that you are no longer indifferent about this way of salvation, nor seeking to be saved in any other way. It is even the persuasion of your spirit, that there is no other way. You

feel also in your inmost soul, that unless you obtain an interest in Christ, you must perish; and, whatever you may think of his *willingness* to save you, your whole spirit is fully persuaded that Jesus is *able* to save you. So far your own spirit witnesses without hesitation or reserve. Well: so far you are evidently not an *unbeliever*. All this is not *all* the truth concerning either the person or the work of Christ; but it is *some* of it. It is, at least, the hearty belief of this part of the Gospel—that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus. It is also the hearty belief, that Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto him. It is also the hearty belief, that by the works of the law, no flesh living can be justified. All these things are the living and settled convictions of your mind, as well as the express words of God; and, knowing that you did not always believe these things fully, you are almost persuaded that your strong conviction of their truth is from the work of the Holy Spirit on *your* mind.

You do, then, accede to all this, as being the witness of your own spirit? Well: that witness is *proof* that thus far you are not an unbeliever. Let this, then, be a *settled* point. And now, carry the inquiry farther into the witness of your own spirit. Does your mind or conscience charge you with *disbelieving* any part of the divine testimony concerning the person or the work of Christ? The substance of that testimony is, that Christ is God manifested in the flesh, as a sacrifice for sin. Now, if you disbelieve this, it is a matter of no consequence what else you believe. It is not, however, disbelief of it, to be unable to comprehend it fully. It is the great mystery of godliness, and therefore faith has to do with the *fact*, not with the nature of the union of divinity and humanity, in the person of the Saviour. What, then, is the witness of your spirit to this fact? If you are conscious that you believe it, on the authority of God, to be the fact, thus far also you are evidently not an *unbeliever:* for what *more* could you, or indeed any one, do with it, than believe it to

be the truth of God? Perhaps you are ready to say, that you never *doubted* the divinity or the atonement of the Saviour; and that, as you believe no more now than what you did while you were careless, you cannot reckon your present believing real faith. Well: what do you reckon it? UNBELIEF? It certainly is not *that*, if words have any meaning. It may be weak faith, but it cannot be unbelief, if it embrace the truths which you say it does. And as to your having believed, while careless, all that you do now, it is unreasonable and unwise to think so for a moment. It was not believing with the heart, nor for the purpose for which the Son of God became incarnate, and was crucified; and therefore it was the worst kind of unbelief. Whereas, if you now rest all your hope of salvation upon the atonement, because you believe that the divinity of Christ rendered his death a glorious atonement; this is faith. Words have no meaning, if this be not faith. You might as well call light darkness, as consider this unbelief. You are *not* an unbeliever, if your

spirit bear you witness that you embrace whatever God has testified concerning the person and work of his Son.

You are now, if you regard this grand point as settled in your own case, in the direct way to obtain the witness of the Spirit to your own adoption. And the first thing you want in order to this is, to be enabled to see and believe the connexion there is between faith in Christ, and your being a child of God. Now, faith and sonship are inseparably connected in the Word of God. Hence the express declaration concerning Christ and believers: "Unto as many as received him, gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name;" that is, they are empowered, or warranted, to regard themselves as the children of God. Accordingly, when Paul found the Galatian believers doubting, or misunderstanding this warrant, he said, "Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus."

Now, it is to the truth of this gracious connexion between faith and sonship, that the Holy Spirit witnesses; and the chief part of

his witness is, to show us that it is true in our own case. Indeed, the *whole* of his witness consists in filling, affecting, and influencing our spirit with the sweet persuasion, that it is "the truth of God;" that we are *warranted* to believe ourselves the children of God, because all our faith is in the Son of God. This persuasion may vary, from time to time, in its fulness, clearness, and sweetness; but, even when strongest, its true glory is, that it is *true* that we are the children of God by faith. The witness of the Spirit is not, therefore, different from what the Word of God witnesses on this point; but the same. He shows nothing to our spirit but just what God has said in the Scriptures, and bears nothing in on the mind but just what is "written." His witness comes, indeed, with a power and glory at times, which makes the written truth appear newly revealed truth, or something which the believer had never heard, read, or thought of before! The new force given to the old truth is sometimes such, that even wise and good men have almost forgotten, at the moment, the Word *of* God, and thought only of the direct

witness of the Spirit with their spirits. And, in such cases, there was a direct witness: all the melting, cheering, and holy influence of the Word on their minds, was the effect of *divine* influence; but still it was divine influence, working by the divine word, or the Spirit showing clearly and powerfully what had been overlooked or misunderstood before. No *new* truth, but the *glory* of the old was brought home with demonstration and power; for even when the witness of the Holy Spirit goes farthest in sweetness and glory, it does not go one hair's breadth beyond, or away from, what is already revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

And it is self-evident that nothing more can be wanted, either for comfort or establishment. What more could you wish, than to know that you *are* what you desire to be—a child of God? If, therefore, that be already revealed in the Scriptures, the first thing you really need, in this matter, is an increase of faith to believe the fact. Now, it is expressly revealed, that "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;"

and that as many as "receive" Christ, or believe on Him, are empowered to believe also that they are "become the sons of God." Whenever, therefore, you understand and believe this, in your own case, you will have the witness of the Spirit: for this is the truth of God; and it is to "the truth," that the Spirit witnesses. "But," you are ready to say, "if the sonship or adoption of believers is revealed already in the Scriptures, what need is there for another witness to it? If I can learn, from the Word of God, that I am a child of God, is not the witness of the Spirit unnecessary?" Now, in *your* case, it is evidently very necessary; for you have *not* learned, hitherto, that your "faith hath saved you." You hardly believe this now. You are, perhaps, not yet sure that your believing on Christ is saving faith. There is still a *mist* around the whole subject, as it regards yourself. It is, indeed, breaking upon you, and brightening up here and there; but you are almost as much afraid of the light as you are of the darkness. How can you, then, *suspect* that the testimony of the Word should

set aside the witness of the Spirit? You have often heard and read the *written* testimony of God, that believers are all his children by faith; but hitherto, you have not ventured to believe this fact in your own case, and can hardly venture to do so now. It is therefore self-evident that, instead of doing away with, or lessening the need of the Spirit's witness, the necessity of it is demonstrated by the very difficulty which you feel in trying to believe this part of the Gospel for yourself. Never, perhaps, did you feel more deeply than at this moment, your own need of being led by the Spirit into all truth.

"True," you say; "but surely the witness of the Spirit is something more spiritual than all this: I have always thought that it consisted in a peculiar divine impression on the mind, or a peculiar manifestation to the soul." Well: is it not a *divine* impression, and manifestation too, when the mind feels persuaded of the worth and all-sufficiency of the Saviour; and of the truth of the great scriptural fact, that salvation is by faith alone, that it may be of grace entirely? The *natural*

impression is, that salvation is by works alone, or by the fruits of faith, rather than by faith itself. If, therefore, you think lightly of feeling persuaded that you must be saved by faith, or perish, you underrate the value of your own convictions: for this conviction, if connected with love to holiness, is the best part and proof of the work of the Holy Spirit on your mind; and, in fact, is the beginning of his witness too.

But still you are not satisfied on this point, but feel almost sure that the witness of the Spirit must be a more peculiar impression, or manifestation, than grace to believe all the truth. Well: an impression of *what?* A manifestation of *what?* There is nothing to impress or manifest but *revealed* truth; and as that *is* revealed which you want to know, the only thing you require, in order to enjoy the comfort of it, is grace to understand and believe it for yourself. For, do you not see that any impression of what is not revealed could never be relied on, because it could never be proved to be a *divine* impression? *The manifestation* of any thing to the soul

different from, or additional to, the Word of God, could, indeed, come only from a wicked spirit. It is, therefore, evidently *wrong* to look for any divine witness, but what the Spirit of God bears to the truth of the divine word.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. IV.

THE SPECIAL FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.

"*The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness.*" It does not, however, follow from this, that all goodness is "the fruit of the Spirit." All *real* goodness of heart and character is so, of course; but there is much apparent and comparative goodness, which is merely the fruit of education and self-righteousness. Hence the importance of distinguishing between the fruits of the Spirit and the fruits of nature; for these, like some of the fruits of the earth, are occasionally similar in *appearance*, whilst, in reality, they are as different as food and poison. Comparatively, there are many who are good neighbours, good parents, and good *children*: but their goodness, in these social

relations, flows from no love to God, nor from any regard to the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, they do not pretend to be influenced by the Spirit or Word of God in the goodness which they cultivate; it is merely their *way*—their *rule*—their family *system* of acting. This is both the history and mystery of all their comparative goodness.

Now, whatever such goodness be, it certainly is not *religion;* for God is not made its author nor its end. It is not derived from his grace, nor directed to his glory; and, therefore, cannot be satisfactory to Him, however beneficial it may be to society. No wonder: we ourselves would not be satisfied with any goodness in our children, if it were unconnected with love to ourselves as their parents. Did they neglect, avoid, and forget us, we should regard them as *bad* children, however good they were to others, and in other respects. And nothing ought to be held real goodness in a child, when filial love and gratitude are wanting. Much more, therefore, may God, so far as it regards himself, disown all moral

goodness which begins, and goes on, without either love or gratitude to himself.

Nor is this all. There is also a kind of love and gratitude to God, which does not mend the matter very much. I mean, when they refer to Him chiefly as the God of *providence.* Many mistake for religious principle, the pleasure they feel in their worldly lot. They have succeeded in business beyond their own expectations, and better than many who had more to begin with. Providence has smiled on their industry, and kept watch and ward over their interests. Accordingly, they see, and feel, and confess, that God has been very good to them. On this ground, they feel it to be their duty to cultivate some goodness, and to do some good, in grateful return for the divine goodness to themselves. Now, perhaps no natural goodness approaches so near to "the fruit of the Spirit," as this. It is amiable, considerate, and highly consistent with a sense of moral obligation. But, after all, it is often no better than self-righteousness, *and sometimes* it is mere ostentation: and

even when it is *none* of these, it may not be the fruit of the Spirit. Accordingly, many who go all this length in goodness, do not even pretend that they are in the least influenced by the Holy Spirit in any good they do. The utmost they say or think is, "We bless God that we have a heart to do what little good we can in the world." Here the matter begins and ends. They have no *heart* for prayer; no deep sense of their lost condition as sinners; no clear understanding of the way of salvation by the blood of Christ; no settled persuasion of their own need of a "new heart;" and, therefore, neither their general goodness nor gratitude is "the fruit of the Spirit." For the first fruits of the Spirit are convictions of sin and righteousness; or, the drawing away of the soul from sin and self-dependance, to take up with the Cross and holiness. Accordingly, where there is no solicitude to be saved by the blood of the Lamb, there is none of *that* morality which is the fruit of the Spirit.

The truth of these distinctions is both illustrated and confirmed by the order in which

the fruits of the Spirit are classed in the Word of God. "Love, joy, peace," are placed first in the catalogue; and the moral virtues next. Not that "long suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance," are less the fruit of the Spirit than "love, joy, peace;" nor because they are less necessary; but because the moral virtues may be *imitated* without the Spirit, whereas the spiritual graces cannot. Any man may force himself to be temperate; but no man can force himself to *love* God or the Lamb. A man may be constitutionally meek and gentle; but no man loves God, nor rejoices in God, nor has peace with God, naturally. Accordingly, many of the truly serious, who are cultivating all the moral virtues, and who excel in some of them, regard themselves as almost strangers to both the work and witness of the Spirit, because they feel so little love, joy, or peace, in believing. They see, in the case of the primitive believers, that faith wrought by love, and produced joy and peace; and as their own believing does not work in this way, they dare *not regard it* as that faith which is from the

operation of the Holy Ghost. This, however, is a grand mistake, if all their reliance is on Christ for a holy salvation. That is, "the faith of God's elect:" and the only reason why it does not lead to "love, joy, peace," is, that such persons do not understand that their "*faith hath saved*" them: for if they understood and believed that it *had* saved them, they could not be long strangers to love, joy, or peace. And even as it is with them, they are not utter strangers, nor so much strangers to these fruits of the Spirit, as they themselves suspect and say.

I appeal to you who have applied to Christ for a holy salvation, and are relying on Him alone for eternal life: you say, that you feel little or no *love* to God and the Lamb. Do you mean by that, that you feel more *hatred* than love to them? No: you are not conscious of any hatred to them. The bare idea of such a thing shocks you. Well, is there *no* love in this feeling? You are ready to say—"the absence of all hatred does not imply love; we hate no one, but we do not love all alike." True, you have not the same *reason* for loving

all alike; and therefore you have no desire to do so: but you really love all whom you *desire* to love. Now, if you really *desire* to love God and the Lamb, it is certain that you are not even *indifferent* to them, far less hostile to them. There is not an utter want of love, where there is a *wish* to love. Love is, indeed, weak when it consists chiefly in wishes; but even then it is not pretence nor fancy. And if the weakness of it is the cause of shame and sorrow to you, the love itself, although certainly feeble, it is not *insincere*.

Are you then satisfied, in your own mind, that it is really your desire to love God and the Saviour supremely? Well, love to them must have a *beginning*, as well as every other gracious feeling. None of the graces of the Spirit, nor, indeed, of the gifts of nature, spring to maturity at once. The *desire* to love God should, therefore, be welcomed and well treated in the heart; for it is that *seed* from which all love to Him springs, and without which none ever will or can spring up in the heart. Besides, are you not conscious *of loving* God and the Saviour, and their

"commandments," more than you once did? And would you not think it a very great change for the *worse*, were you to relapse to your former state of mind? Would you not even *suffer* a good deal, rather than go back to your old sins and insensibility? Weigh these questions seriously, and answer them fairly. I would not flatter you, nor teach you to think too highly of "the day of small things;" but as it is evidently a day of *something* gracious in your case, I must guard you against despising it. Now, it never will do any good, but real evil, to go on for ever questioning the sincerity of your love; for until you admit that it is not insincere, it cannot increase in strength nor in warmth. It is well, it is necessary, to exercise a keen jealousy over our best feelings; but if they are treated with nothing but jealousy and suspicion, they certainly will not grow better. Faith and love must be "watered," as well as watched; cherished, as well as tried:—for if you get into the habit of trying them as *hypocrites*, or only to find *fault* with them, you will never be able

to come to any satisfactory conclusion, nor to succeed in improving them.

Besides, the kind and degree of love which you want to feel, you never can feel until you believe that God and the Lamb have loved, and do love *you*. It is your doubt of their love to you that keeps down your love to them. This is the real *secret* of all the coldness and weakness you complain of; unless, indeed, some *sin* has still the throne of your heart. Then, indeed, the Holy Ghost will not shed abroad the love of God in your heart. But if this be not the case, what you want, in order to love God more, is to be enabled to believe that God has loved you. Now, why not believe this? You are warranted and welcome to believe this for yourself, if all your faith is in Christ for a holy salvation. And, whatever you may think, you never can *know* that God has loved you, or that Christ "gave himself" for you, but by *believing* it. You may have imagined, hitherto, that the sense or assurance of this, must be born in upon the mind in some mysterious or supernatural manner; but if,

by that, you mean in some way *apart* from believing what God has said, you mistake greatly. You must just take God's word for it, if ever you would be sure that he has loved you. Well, you have his word for it:—"*The Father himself loveth you,*" saith Christ, "*because ye have loved me;*"—and you *have* loved Him, if you have committed your souls to him for salvation, and are willing to obey him.

Now, do you not see, at a glance, that the moment the soul admits the sweet persuasion of God's love to itself, it is impossible not to love him? Try it in your own case, if it be merely as an experiment. Suppose that a voice, direct from heaven, assured you that God had "loved you with an everlasting love," and that, therefore, "with loving kindness he had drawn you" to the Cross and the Mercy-seat;—could you hear this assurance without a glowing heart? Would not all your affections warm, and melt, and flow out to God? You feel at once that such knowledge of *his* love to you, would secure and inflame your

love to Him for ever! Well; if you are sure that you are a believer, you have this assurance in your Bible: and, therefore, it is just as *true*, as if a voice, direct from the heaven of heavens, were to inform you. Why not believe it, then? This was the apostolic way of growing in love. "We love Him, because He first loved us." How did they *know* that God had loved them? They knew that they had "believed through grace," and that God loved all such; and, therefore, they said, "we have known and believed the love wherewith God hath loved us."

Now, as to the *second* special fruit of the Spirit—"Joy;" however you may have complained, hitherto, that you had *no* joy in believing; and however you may have wondered that your application to the Saviour was not followed by "the joy of salvation;" the cause is obvious. It is not because the Spirit has been sovereignly withheld from you; nor that joy does not follow believing now, "as in the days of old;" but, evidently and certainly, because you have, hitherto, believed only

one-half of the Gospel. But, whilst the belief of that half is enough for *safety*, the belief of the other also is requisite in order to "joy."

Consider this. The first and chief part of the Gospel is God's testimony concerning the person and work of his Son. With the belief of this testimony, he has graciously and inseparably connected the promise of eternal life. Hence arises a *second* divine testimony; and it is concerning all who have believed the first with the heart. Now, that second testimony, which is thus concerning them, is, that they "*have* eternal life;" that they "*are* the children of God;" that they "*are* justified;" in a word, that they have *obtained* the mercy and favour they were seeking! Now, the moment they believe that they are actual heirs of the salvation they were believing in Christ for, *joy* must come into their hearts; indeed it cannot be kept out; for it is impossible that any man can be joyless, who believes that all his sins are pardoned, and his soul redeemed, by the blood of Christ. This, then, is that half of the Gospel which you have either not observed before, or not

ventured to believe in your own case. The consequence has been, that all the joy you have had from looking to the Saviour, has been damped and kept down by the chilling suspicion, that he might not save *you*. Sometimes you have got above this fear for a moment, and seen so much of his grace and glory, that you could not doubt his willingness to save even you. You have, then, clasped the dear hope to your heart, and resolved that you would cling to it through life. But how often have you lost your hold of it! It has gone, you know not how. Why? If the neglect of known duty, or the indulgence of known sin, has not been the cause of its withdrawment, the cause is obvious:—you did not see that this fond hope of salvation was fully warranted, and chartered to you, by the express *word* of God. You took up the hope at first, not so much because you felt *warranted* and *welcome*, by that, to do so, but because you were *willing* to do so, and could not be happy without it. Accordingly, whenever you asked yourself the question, "what *right* have I to hope for

so great a salvation?"—you could not answer it to your own satisfaction. You looked at yourself—and felt that you had no claim! You looked at others—and felt afraid to hope. But you did *not* look to the things which are "written" unto them "that believe on the name of the Son of God," that they "*might* KNOW" that they "have eternal life." Had you looked at them, your joy might have been "full." Let it be so now: for "it is written," that whosoever believeth shall never perish, but have everlasting life; and you do believe, if you love the Gospel.

All this, I am aware, is easily said. I feel, with you, that it is easier to advise than to act here. Paul evidently felt this, when he said to believers, "Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, rejoice." This repetition of the injunction implies that, like ourselves, they did not understand at first, or they forgot at times, the warrant which faith has, in the divine Word, to "rejoice always." It was, however, a *mistake*, when believers were afraid to rejoice in the Lord: for, except when they become remiss or irregular, they

are always warranted to cherish the joy o salvation, as the strength of their heart.

In like manner "PEACE," whilst it is th fruit of the Spirit, is also the effect of faith It is not a feeling of tranquillity infused int the mind or the conscience, apart from "the truth;" but by the truth. The Word of Go is "the seed" of that peace which is the frui of the Spirit. By overlooking this fact, an by mistaking the real nature of spiritual peace many perplex and sadly hinder themselves i the divine life. Indeed, they often look for a kind of peace which is not *promised*, and ex pect it in a way which is not *revealed*. What do you mean when you pray for peace? What would you consider as an answer to this prayer? If you mean by peace, that sweet serenity of soul which you have felt when you have obtained great enlargement of heart in secret devotion, or when you have been, as it were, carried "out of the body" by some glorious sermon, full of the glory of the Saviour; you mistake the matter. This is, indeed, peace; even "the peace of God, *which passeth* understanding;" but it is that

degree of it, which is more the *reward* of extraordinary devotional habits, than the effect of ordinary faith. Tastes of such holy tranquillity are vouchsafed, at times, to some when they begin to follow the Lamb, that they may be encouraged to follow him fully, and convinced that his ways are peace; but still, it is his *own* peace which he has left to his followers, as their ordinary portion. "Peace I leave unto you: My peace give I unto you."

This was a distinction peculiarly wanted by the first disciples. They were naturally sanguine in their expectations, and prone to picture to themselves bright days and great things. Had, therefore, the Saviour said nothing but "Peace I leave unto you,"—the probability is, that they would have flattered themselves with a sunny prospect of ease and tranquillity. How great, then, must have been their disappointment when they had to endure "fears without, and fightings within!" In that case, they might have said, "We l[illegible] for peace, and, behold, war." All thi[illegible] however, prevented by the qualifying c[illegible]

"My peace give I unto you." This defined the legacy, without lessening its real value: for the Saviour's own peace, although it did not exempt him from trials, nor from the temptations of Satan, nor even from the occasional hidings of the Divine presence from his soul; yet it secured both his safety and triumph under them all. Accordingly, *that* kind and degree of peace his Apostles found during their work and warfare.

Now this distinction we have need to notice and remember; for we too are prone to expect what is not promised. It would quite suit our taste and wishes to have no cares, trials, or temptations. We should be delighted if we were never to have an uneasy nor an unholy thought in our minds again. To have our hearts, like Gabriel's harp, always in tune, would be, indeed, heaven on earth, and the very thing we desire! But all this is the *poetry*, not the sober reality, of religion. It is not to be angels, but to be "saints" on the earth, that we are called by God. "A life of faith on the Son of God," is a life of warfare *against* the lusts of the flesh and of the mind;

a life of watching against unbelief and temptation; a life of obedience and submission to the will of God: 'and the peace which is the fruit of the Spirit, is the persuasion that God is upon our side, and will not suffer us to be overcome. This was the Saviour's own peace, when his heart was broken with reproach and his body agonized with pain, and his soul torn with anguish: and we deceive ourselves, if *we* mean by peace, exemption from trouble of mind or body. Such peace is not promised. The substance of what is promised is, "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*"

Now many who, in their own vague or visionary sense of the word, say that they have no *peace* in believing, are certainly not strangers to this kind and degree of peace: for they evidently bear their trials well, and resist temptation manfully, because they believe that God has some gracious design in all that he calls them to do or suffer.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. V.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

UNTIL this subject is understood, it is impossible for any one, however serious or devotional, to enjoy the witness, or to abound in the fruit, of the Holy Spirit. Now, it is either not clearly understood, or not fully believed, in every case of fear which is not relieved by it. The fear of perishing is utterly incompatible with an intelligent belief of the scriptural fact, that "he who believeth" on Christ, "*is justified;*" unless, indeed, the person who is in fear, is also conscious that he has not faith in the Saviour. In that case, the doctrine of justification by faith cannot, of course, remove his fears; but must, if he *understand* it, increase, instead of lessen, them.

Those, however, who are persuaded that they have faith in the Saviour, and some love to him, but who are still afraid that they are not justified by his righteousness, are certainly labouring under some mistake; for his righteousness is "*upon* all them that believe." It is, therefore, "upon" themselves, as a robe of salvation, if they are believers; and they *are* believers who rely upon and love Jesus Christ for his holy salvation. Those who do so, because they are persuaded of the truth of his divinity and atonement, cannot be *unbelievers*, whatever they may suspect or think. This state of mind is utterly unlike unbelief. It is the very reverse of it, in fact. It is faith, if it be any thing; for faith is the cordial belief of "the truth" concerning the person and work of Christ. Indeed, if it were not, then it would follow that faith is the belief of *conjectures;* for unless conjectures, there is nothing but "the truth" to believe; and surely *guesses*, however plausible, should never be preferred to the word of God, nor even connected with it. Besides, there is no need for any, seeing God has graciously and

inseparably connected with the belief of "the truth as it is in Jesus," the promise of justification and eternal life. All things necessary for life and godliness are promised to all who embrace the Divine testimony with an honest heart. Whoever, therefore, does so, has no need to perplex himself with conjectures about his own adoption, redemption, or election. He has *been* elected, redeemed, and adopted, if he has "believed through grace," and for holy purposes, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." All who "hold the truth" (except, indeed, those who "hold it in unrighteousness") have no occasion at all to doubt whether the Saviour died for *them*. He both *loved* them, and gave himself *for* them, who receive the truth in the love of it. These are "true sayings" of the true God; and, therefore, the only thing wanted in order to enjoy the comfort of them, is to be enabled to believe them for ourselves. This, indeed, the Holy Spirit will not enable us to do, if we are either indulging sin, or neglecting duty, or seeking a sanction for inconsistencies; but *where* this is not the case, the Spirit will not

refuse nor delay to increase our faith, if we try to grow in knowledge, that we may grow in grace. For reluctance to "lead into all truth" is no part of his character. He is a "free Spirit," and therefore, although he teach gradually, he will teach certainly, and "to profit."

When there is, however, perplexity on the subject of Justification by Faith, the best thing that can be done is, to examine the subject as if we had never heard of it before. And we ought to feel no reluctance to do so. Let us examine it now.

"*How can man be justified with God?*" This solemn question was put by Bildad to Job; and although Job's answer was not explicit at the moment, his opinion on the subject may be inferred from the fact, that he had said before, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me." Paul, however, has given a direct and full answer to this momentous question, by stating explicitly how he himself, and his fellow-converts, sought to be justified.—"*We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith*

of Christ, and not by the works of the law." (Gal. ii. 16.) In this way, whatever it mean, Paul and his associates sought for justification before God. And whatever justification is, they *found* it by this means. Accordingly he said, "Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." And again, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus clearly does the Apostle declare both the means which he employed, and his success in using them. He took God's way, and God gave him his own wish. Although the chief of sinners, God justified Paul, when he believed on Christ for righteousness. Not, indeed, that God justified Paul's *conduct* or *principles* as a sinner. No! for if "he that justifieth the wicked is an abomination to the Lord," it is self-evident that, in the sense of thinking or declaring Paul *innocent*, the Lord himself did not, and could not, justify him. God forgiveth "iniquity, transgression, and sin;" but, in doing so, he "will by no means *clear* the guilty" from the charge of having been guilty. He

treats sinners as kindly as if they were *innocent*, or as if they had never been sinners, when they return from sin to the Saviour; but he neither considers them innocent, nor palliates their guilt. He forgives, and even forgets, all the sins of all who believe; but he allows no believer to forget that he was a sinner, nor to suppose that his sins were not hateful and hated by Him. It is, therefore, because believing sinners are accepted for the sake of Christ, *as if they were not sinners*, that they are said to be justified by God.

The scriptural doctrine of Justification by Faith is,—that the Saviour was treated as if he had been *guilty*, in order that the guilty, who believe in Him, might be accepted as if they were *innocent*. This is what Paul means when he says of Christ, "He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." The Saviour had no sin, he "knew no sin," yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. Why? Emmanuel had voluntarily, cheerfully, and fully, put himself in the room of sinners; and therefore he was treated as if their sins had been his own, so far

as the punishment of them went. He had to bear the *curse* as fully as if he had personally incurred it. And just because he did so, the *blessing* is as freely given to them who believe, as if they personally deserved it; for what the Saviour *deserves* for his obedience and death, that the sinner obtains by relying on him for a holy salvation.

This is the justification revealed and promised in the Gospel. This is the justification which Paul sought and found by believing; he was welcomed, accepted, and blessed, by God at the cross, as if he had never sinned; because on that cross the Lamb of God made *his* soul an offering for sin. And what *more* could a sinner wish, than to be received with as much tenderness as if he were *innocent?* Innocence secures the fulness of the Divine love and favour. The angels are innocent, and therefore are the sons of God, radiant with his glory, and replenished with his own blessedness for ever. And yet—Gabriel when he tunes his harp, and prostrates his crown before the eternal throne; and seraphim, when they cover their faces with their

wings, in adoration of God and the Lamb, are not more welcome than a sinner returning to God by the blood of the Lamb is! He, indeed, is not innocent; but, for the sake of that blood on which he relies, he is received as graciously and loved as freely, as admiring cherubim or adoring seraphim are. Accordingly Paul, when speaking of "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," as studying the manifold wisdom of God, adds, "In Christ, we (*we* in common with *them*) have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Him."

It is no valid objection against this simple view of justification, that God visits the transgressions of believers "with the rod," and their iniquity "with stripes." In this respect, indeed, they are not treated as innocent; but, what is far *better* for them, "God dealeth" with them "as with sons." "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Only the *really* innocent can be exempted *from all suffering*. Believers are, however,

treated as righteous, so far as it is *good* for them to be so.

They are adopted into the family of God, and made heirs of eternal life, as freely and fully as if they were personally righteous or wholly innocent: and if they are made to feel their sinfulness by their pardon, and are only acquitted as those who were justly condemned; this method of showing mercy does not lessen the value of the boon, but, indeed, enhances it, and sustains the honour of the law and the Gospel at the same time. For it would not be good for us to be pardoned so, that our guilt should seem palliated; nor to escape from the curse so, that we should not feel that we had been under it. Such a way of saving sinners would be as injurious to their own spiritual interests, as it would be dishonourable to God. Accordingly, it is not God's way in justifying the ungodly who believe in Jesus: he welcomes them as if they were godly, but makes them to feel and confess that they are ungodly. Thus, even the *aboundings* of divine grace towards sinners are "in all wisdom and prudence;" for whilst they remove the sting and

stain of guilt from the conscience, they increase, rather than lessen, the sense of the evil of sin, in every conscience which is purged by the blood of Christ from "dead works,"—*i. e.* from works which deserve death.

Here, then, is the justification which all sinners need, and which awaits every sinner who, like Paul, will believe in Christ, that he may be justified by the faith of Christ: God will accept him as righteous, for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, and treat him for ever as one reconciled by the blood of the Cross. Like the father of the returned prodigal, God will rejoice over him, and receive him into complete sonship. Having thus seen what justification really is, you now see,

FIRST, *How the Gospel suits your case as a sinner.* It assures you that, by believing on Christ, God will welcome and accept you as fully as if you had never sinned. Now this is exactly what you want and wish. You do *not* wish to be treated as He treats the innocent angels, except so far as that is necessary to the safety of your soul. Accordingly, you do not object to those fatherly chastisements which

the children of God have to endure. What you desire is, to be a child of God. Well; there is ample provision in the Gospel for making you what you thus wish to be; for, in coming to God by Christ, he will treat you, for Christ's sake, as if you were righteous. Now it is because you are *not* righteous, but sinful and unholy, that you are afraid. All your fear arises from your aggravated guilt and utter unworthiness. You cannot forget what you have been, nor overlook what you are, as a sinner before God. Well; you ought not to forget nor overlook it. It is, however, a mercy to feel sensible of it, and humbled for it! But now tell me, How would you feel if you were as innocent as a holy angel? Suppose that you had never sinned in thought, word, or deed, would you be *afraid* then? Would you, in that case, doubt whether God would admit you into his favour and kingdom? No; "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness," and therefore you would feel confident, if you were perfectly righteous, that you would meet with no refusal from God. You could *calculate* to a certainty then, upon eternal

happiness! So you might; for God can as soon cease to live, as refuse to love the innocent. "But what is all this to the point," you say, "seeing I am not only not innocent, but very guilty and depraved too?" True; but if there be a *righteousness* so meritorious, that, for the sake of it, God can and will treat you as if you were not guilty, this would answer the same purpose as perfect innocence on your own part. Do you not see that? You are, indeed, utterly unworthy; but the Saviour is infinitely worthy: if, therefore, you can have all the benefit of *his* worthiness placed to your own account, you would be as safe as if you had never sinned. Now this is just what God does for sinners, when they apply to Christ for all their salvation: he places to their account the righteousness of Christ, so that he welcomes them as if it were all their own.

Now this is the provision made for the justification of the ungodly who will believe in Christ; and, most certainly, it fully meets your case as a sinner, however guilty you may [illegible] for your unworthiness cannot exceed the [illegible] thiness of the Lamb slain. "True," you [illegible]

"the righteousness of Christ is enough to justify me, or any sinner; but the question is, *will* God impute that righteousness to me? *will* he give me the benefit of it?" This question implies a doubt, if not a fear, that he may refuse to do so in your case. I therefore ask at once,—*Why* do you fear that God will refuse to justify you for the sake of Christ? Has he anywhere *said* that he will not? Is it his *custom* to refuse those who are willing to submit to the righteousness of Christ? Has he ever sent away *any* one soul unclothed with that robe, who sought it in good earnest? No! All history, all heaven, says No! And were all hell compelled to answer these questions, it would say No. Why, then, are *you* afraid of a refusal? There is nothing in the whole, or in any part, of the character of God, which renders it *necessary* that he should reject you; for, by the righteousness of Christ, he can be perfectly just in justifying any one who believes: and, as his *justice* is thus on your side, it is self-evident that none of his other perfections can be against you. In like manner, there is nothing in the character of the

Saviour, which renders your rejection necessary or likely. The robe of his righteousness is wide enough to embrace, and large enough to cover, your soul; and he is not less willing now to enfold sinners in it, than when he threw it around the chief of sinners. For as his righteousness is "upon" all them who do believe, so it is free unto all who *will* believe, on him for justification. Now, really, if these facts do not fully meet your case as a sinner, it must be a very *peculiar* case, and its peculiarity must be *imaginary*, not actual; unless, indeed, you are still uncertain whether you are a believer or not.

But now, even if you have not yet, like Paul, believed in Christ, "that" you "might be *justified*;" still, something is gained by this inquiry, if you now understand what justification is, and see the *possibility* of your own justification. Are you then convinced that God could be just even in justifying *you* by faith? Is the way of acceptance through the merits of Christ plain to you, in all things but upon the point of *believing*? Could you now venture to *hope* freely, if you were sure that

your believing is faith? Well; we are, then, in a fair way to bring this matter to a favourable issue. And it will facilitate this, to mark distinctly *what Paul believed in Christ for.*

Now he says, that he believed that he might be *justified.* His own justification was, therefore, his *first* object when he applied to Christ. And it *ought* to have been the first blessing which he sought by faith; for, until a condemned sinner is *acquitted* from the curse of the law, no other blessing, nor all the other blessings of grace, could *save* him. The sentence of condemnation must be repealed, or he must perish, whatever else were done for him. This solemn fact is, however, not sufficiently attended to, even by the serious: and hence it is, that many of them *begin* their believing in Christ--not in order that they may be justified at once, or first, but that they may be made *better,* and be "born again." I do not, of course, find fault with this object in believing. Far from it. The man who does not apply to Christ to be made a "new creature," does not apply to him for the grand purpose for which Christ died and rose again. But still,

salvation from sin, although the chief practical object of the Atonement, is not its *only* object. Christ died to redeem us from the curse of the law; and as nothing can place the soul in safety while it is under that curse, those who know this should *begin* their believing on Christ, for the express purpose of being justified, or freed from the curse. This plan of proceeding would not displace their moral designs, nor lessen their solicitude about holiness; and it would bring their faith in Christ to the test, far more effectually than the other plan does. The man who is trying to rely on the Saviour, merely that he may be enabled to become a *better* man, finds this kind of believing so easy, that it is no wonder if he doubt whether his believing is *that* faith which is produced by the operation of the Spirit;—whereas, were he to go to the mercy-seat for the distinct purpose of believing in Christ, in order that the *curse* of the eternal law might be taken off from his soul; this solemn errand would show him how much faith he needed, and how necessary it is to pray, "Lord help my unbelief, and increase my faith."

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. VI.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND THE LAMB.

In nothing, perhaps, is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart more sensible or self-evident, than in the new views and feelings which it produces in regard to prayer. Even where prayer is not altogether neglected, nor hurried over heedlessly, there is a wonderful change of sentiment takes place, whenever the Gospel takes effect upon the mind. We see and feel then, that, except for temporal mercies, we never prayed in thorough good earnest, nor had any real love or relish for devotion. It was often performed as a task, and always as a mere duty. We attended to it rather to prevent temporal evil, than to *obtain spiritual* good; and more from a dread

of the consequences of being prayerless, than from any pleasure we had in praying. Indeed, as to *pleasure* in devotion, it seemed to us a contradiction in terms, or an impossible thing. Accordingly, if we knew any one who was in the habit of spending much time in his closet, we were ready, if not to rank him with the Pharisees, who loved "long prayers," to wonder what he found to say during the time. And when we heard ministers appeal to such men, affirming that they sometimes *left* their closets with more reluctance than they ever felt on *entering* them, and that they could almost have chosen to die on their knees, or to have spent an eternity in that happy frame of mind, we either knew not what to think, or thought that they had a very *strange* taste indeed. In a word, there was nothing seemed so unlikely to us, as that we should ever take pleasure in praying. But lo! when we awoke to the worth of our immortal souls, and were made alive to the infinite value of an everlasting salvation, we were glad of any opportunity of pouring out our hearts unto God. Our difficulty then was, not how to find

time or heart for prayer, but how to obtain answers to prayer: and we were never so happy as when hope and peace were stealing upon our minds, whilst thus wrestling with God for mercy. Then we began to understand what we had heard about the pleasures of devotion, and no longer wondered that communion with God should be magnetic to the soul. And it is no wonder! For what can be so delightful as that holy calm of the mind which enables us to unbosom unto God, as unto a father, all our feelings and desires; to dwell on all his perfections, not only without dismay or dislike, but with complacency and confidence; to repeat and plead all his great and precious promises with faith and hope; and to anticipate his guidance until death, and his presence through eternity? This is a joy which the world cannot give. Even when it does not rise so high as all this, it is more satisfying than any human pleasure; for the heart is relieved and soothed, if it can only pour out its fears and anxieties into the bosom of God. The bare consciousness of having felt as in his presence, wept as in his presence,

and spoken as in his presence, leaves a sweet solemnity upon the spirits, which is healing, if not exhilarating. And when the soul can realize God as noticing, listening, and pitying, and feels itself getting nearer and nearer to his presence and heart, and finds itself melted and impressed, as if he were visibly present or audibly speaking, then its joy is "unspeakable," even if it is not "full of glory."

These hints will remind you of the

"Moments rich in blessing,"

which you have spent upon your knees before the Cross and the mercy-seat. You can, indeed, never forget those closet interviews with God and the Lamb; for they were the chief means of determining your choice, of fixing your principles, and of forming your character. You may, indeed, have lost so much of your first devotional spirit, that you no longer obtain such happy interviews with God in your closet; and, if so, you cannot remember the past without pain. You cannot, however, *forget* the days of old, nor the

morning of your first love. They are imperishable recollections in every renewed soul; for when communion with God *sets* as a day-star in the heart, the memory of it *rises* as a dog-star in the conscience. Your shadow is not more inseparable from you than the consciousness of your loss and declension; and hence your secret, if not your public, language is, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone in my tabernacle!"

Now, when those who have enjoyed communion with God lose it thus, there can be no doubt that there has been, on their own part, some sin, imprudence, or remissness, which occasioned the loss: for God is not the *first* to hide his face, nor does he ever withhold his presence arbitrarily. He may not always manifest himself to the soul so sensibly and sweetly as at first; but he does not withdraw his presence entirely, except when he is provoked: but as it is the exhalations from the earth, and not from the heavens, which form the clouds and mists that hide the natural sun so it is something from ourselves, not from

God, which conceals the Sun of Righteousness from those who, having once walked in his light, now walk in darkness. Such being the fact of the case, it is self-evident that the darkness cannot be removed, but by the removal of that which brought it on, whatever it was. Whether sin or sloth, negligence or irregularity, wrong tempers or bad habits, they must be abandoned, if we would have the light of the Divine countenance, or the joy of salvation restored. For, "*if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*" We never can combine a worldly spirit with a devotional spirit, nor keep up a good hope in a bad conscience. In like manner, if less time than usual is allowed for secret prayer, or less pains taken to enter into and keep up the spirit of it, communion with God is not to be obtained, and need not be expected. God does not, indeed, exact a *long* time for prayer; but, until we seek him with our "whole heart," he will not cheer our hearts with the sense of his presence. He will be "inquired of," before he will shine forth from between the

cherubim. Now, hasty and heartless prayer does not amount to *inquiring;* and it hinders the manifestations of the Divine presence. Indeed *haste,* like the unbelief of the Jews, which prevented Christ from doing many mighty works amongst them, prevents God from communing with the soul from the mercy-seat. There is not *time* for it, when we are in haste to get away from our closets. We ourselves are not *prepared* to enjoy or improve it, when we are up from our knees in a few minutes. We could not commune with a friend in that space of time, nor in that state of mind: so that, when prayer comes to this low ebb, it is no wonder if *Bethel* is turned into *Luz* again, and the soul sent empty away from the throne of grace.

But, whilst all this is only too true, it is equally true that *mistakes,* on the subject of communion with God, prevail so as to prevent it in a great measure, even when there is much prayer and watchfulness maintained. Some do not venture to *expect* much of the Divine *presence, but* actually lay their account with *walking often* in darkness, because they see

how often Job, and David, and Asaph, and Jeremiah, and the Old Testament saints, were under the hidings of the Divine countenance. Observing this fact, some believers take for granted, and as a matter of course, that they must experience similar trials of their faith and patience, however they act.

Now, it is certainly true, that the complaints of the Old Testament saints are only too appropriate to the generality of Christians. There *is* almost all the darkness and distress of mind, which the Psalms are employed to express, and which they do express so fully and emphatically. But this should not be the case—it is not *necessarily* the case—in the church of Christ. We live under a "better Covenant," and brighter promises; and therefore it is our own fault, by misconduct or mistake, if we have no more light than those who lived under the old Covenant. If, however, we are willing and trying to walk closely with God, and to enjoy an habitual sense of his presence, why form our ideas or expectations from the state of things under the old *Covenant*? It certainly does not follow, as a

matter of course, that, because *David* was often in darkness, a real Christian must be so too. It is not a matter of necessity that, because Job could not find the Divine presence, we should be unable to find it. These good men had, indeed, some greater excellencies of character than we can pretend to; and, on that ground, were more likely to be honoured with more of the Divine presence; but the dispensations which they lived under did not provide for so much of it as the Gospel does. Christ says to us, "He that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Accordingly, we do not find the Apostles complaining, as the Prophets did, that they were under the hidings of God's face. They complain bitterly of the presence and pressure of a body of sin and death, and of a law in their members which warred against the law of their minds; but never of an *absent* God.

This matter requires to be looked into minutely, seeing so many form their opinions and expectations of communion with God, from the old, instead of the new, Covenant. Now, we do not take the old Covenant for our

principal guide in any thing else. We even boast of our superior light and liberty under the Gospel, and of our nearer and freer access to God, and of our greater privileges. But, where is the *reality* of these blessings, if we *must* be as often in darkness and distress of soul as David was? I say "must," because it is certain that we *may* and *shall* go without the sun, if we do not walk circumspectly. The Holy Spirit will frown upon sin and sloth as fully under the Gospel as he did under the law, and certainly withhold and withdraw the joy of salvation from backsliders. All this is inevitable from the eternal principles of the Divine character and government, because it is the only way of preventing or curing sin and backsliding amongst believers. But still, the real question is, What have they to expect under the Gospel, whose life and conversation "becometh the Gospel?" Now, as they are not warranted to expect exemption from trials or temptations, it must be more of the Divine presence than was usually enjoyed by the saints under the law. Accordingly, except in those churches which had fallen from their first

love and purity, we find, amongst the primitive Christians, *no* indications of those complaints which were so frequent in the Jewish Church. The sad and piercing cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"—and "Why art thou silent at the voice of my roaring?"—is never heard from any believer, in any of the New Testament Churches;—a plain proof that, after the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, believers had boldness of access into the holy of holies by the blood of Christ, and were thus sure to find God whenever they sought him. Now, from this fact, and not from the case of David, we ought to form our opinions and expectations of communion with God.

Besides, it is by far too little remembered that David was a prophetic type of the Saviour, and thus gave utterance to *his* mediatorial sorrows, as well as to his own personal sorrows,—a fact which lessens very much the *number* of those hidings of the Divine presence which he seems to have experienced. In like manner, their number is still further reduced by the fact, that, under the Jewish dispensation, *temporal* calamities were considered as hidings

of God's countenance; and *delay* in removing affliction was spoken of as the shutting out of prayer. It is, therefore, both unnecessary and unwise to make the apparent experience of David the standard of what may be expected from a close walk with God in Christ. By doing so, many have deprived themselves of much comfort, and God of much honour.

The truth of these remarks is not affected by the melancholy fact, that the enjoyment of the Divine presence, or intimate communion with God, is a rare thing in the present day. It certainly is so: but not because God is *unwilling* to commune with us at the mercy-seat—not because there is not ample provision made for nearness and freeness of access to him,—but because so few seek him with their "whole heart," or allow him *time* to manifest his presence to their souls. Settle it, therefore, in your own mind, for it is settled already and unalterably in his Word, that you are "not straitened" in God or in the Lamb. Your fellowship may be truly and habitually with them, if you are willing to "walk in the light," as they are in the light. If you are

ready, "all things" in heaven "are ready," for sweet communion with God. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne with a censer of meritorious incense, in the shadow of which you may always kneel with safety, and from the fragrance of which your prayers may always find acceptance, when they are according to the will of God. And the infirmity-helping Spirit is ever at hand to teach you how to pray, and what to pray for. "*Enter,*" therefore, "*into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*"

In order, however, to understand the subject of communion with God aright, more mistakes require to be removed. Now, it is a mistake to imagine that nothing amounts to the Divine presence in prayer, but what produces a holy calm of mind, or a high excitement of feeling. We naturally make our first sensible enjoyments in prayer, the *standard* by which we judge of our future success. Accordingly, when we do not find that delight nor liberty which we experienced formerly,

we are apt to conclude that God has hid his face from us, or that we have lost the spirit of devotion. Under this impression, we go heartless and hopeless to our closets, and feel, at times, almost inclined to give up prayer, because we have no longer our usual enjoyment in it. Sometimes, indeed, our hearts are so cold and dead, that it seems an insult to God to attempt prayer in such a frame. We cannot, however, live long without it; and therefore we are compelled to pray, as we can, soon. Our memory, however, clings to the sweet and soothing moments of the days of old, and our souls continue to long for the return of these "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Now this is right: but it is *wrong* to make them the standard of the Divine presence. Such ecstatic enjoyment in devotion, as that which is sometimes vouchsafed to the soul at the *outset*, is not necessary in order to our going on in the walk of faith. For, when we began to follow Christ, there was reluctance, yea aversion, of heart to prayer, to be overcome. It was, therefore, *necessary*, in order to reconcile and attach us

to prayer, to grant such enjoyment in it, as should prove to us that it was no vain nor wearisome thing to wait on God. But now we are convinced of this, and ashamed of our former prejudices against devotion. We know by experience that it is "good to draw nigh unto God," nor could any one persuade us that it is insipid or useless work. We are not ashamed to avow that our happiest moments have been spent at the throne. So far, therefore, our first communion with God has answered the purpose of establishing the claims and the habit of prayer: and this being accomplished, raptures should not be necessary to maintain them, but the steady oar of duty, without the full sail of excitement, enough to carry us on.

This is, however, only the lowest view of the matter, and but introductory to more scriptural views of it. The real fact of the case is—that our first enjoyments in prayer are not always connected with clear views of the whole scheme of salvation. What we *knew of it* at first, we felt deeply, and prized *highly; but,* then, we attached quite as much

importance to our own feelings, as to the *facts* which gave rise to them; and drew, perhaps, more of our comfort from them, than from the Gospel itself. We might not, indeed, be aware of this at the time, and may never have intended to do so; but that we really did so, is evident from the single fact, that when our *feelings* began to decline, our comfort decayed with them, although our belief of the Gospel continued almost unaltered;—a plain proof that we attached, though perhaps unintentionally, more importance to the work of the Spirit *in* us, than to the work of Christ *for* us. God, I am fully aware, does not make the nice distinctions which theorists do on this subject, nor does he scorn the confusion of ideas which mark our first applications to the Saviour. He can listen with pleasure to the broken music of a "bruised reed," however *Sandemanianism* may despise it. But, whilst all this is true, it is equally true that He will gradually bring off converts from relying on their *feelings*, just as he brought them off from relying on their works. In a

word, he will make Christ himself, and his finished work, more precious to our souls, than any feelings which they give rise to.

Here then, except the Holy Spirit has been grieved by an untender walk, is the grand reason why God does not continue our sensible and rapturous enjoyments in prayer: we were, unawares, it may be, but certainly, putting it in the place of the Saviour himself; and therefore God wisely and kindly withheld it as a direct communication from his Spirit, that we might draw all our hope and comfort from the Gospel itself, and learn to live by faith upon Christ as he is revealed to us in the Scriptures. God has not, therefore, been hiding his face from you, nor yet shutting out your prayer, because he has not shone upon your soul in prayer as formerly; but because you required to be more completely "shut up unto the faith." You were living more by *sense* than by faith, and thus it became necessary to draw and drive you off from changeable feelings to an unchangeable Saviour. *Accordingly*, the want of sensible enjoyment

has compelled you to re-examine the plan of salvation, and to re-consider whether you were seeking to be justified by faith, or, "as it were, by the works of the law."

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. VII.

THE HOPE OF SALVATION THE BEST SAFEGUARD OF THE UNDERSTANDING AGAINST ERROR, AND OF THE HEART AGAINST SIN.

ALEXANDER the Great having, on one occasion, distributed the whole of his private fortune amongst his friends and generals, was asked, why he left nothing for himself: "HOPE is still left for me," said the ardent monarch. And, in the affairs of this life, hope is still the last thing which we relinquish. It seats itself upon the throne of the heart in the morning of life, and leaves it only when the heart is breaking under the cold hand of death. It hovers around the cradle of our infancy, when "*it doth not appear what we shall be;*" and over the coffin of our old age,

when it doth not appear what we are. Hope is the sun that rules the "day," and the moon that rules the "night" of life. It is the rainbow which gilds the clouds of our calamity, and the morning star which leads on our brighter prospects. In a word, hope is to the soul, what the soul is to the body—the mainspring of life and action. Take it away, and soon the energies of the body and the mind wither and perish. Hopeless labour is all fatigue; hopeless enterprise is unsteady; hopeless suffering is overwhelming.

Whatever, therefore, may be said in theory, against hoping too much, and whatever may be proved from experience, against the indulgence of sanguine hopes, the sober fact is, that hope is essential to success in all the business of life; because, without it, diligence is weak and resolution wavering. The business of life could not go on, nor the trials of life be sustained, if mankind did not wear the helmet of hope. It is their strength and safeguard amidst the duties and sufferings of the present state of being.

All this is equally true of the hope of

salvation: it is the helmet of the Christian, which, by protecting his head from mental error, fortifies his heart against temptation, distraction, and despondency. His very *character* is both formed and confirmed chiefly by the hope of salvation, and rises or falls as that hope is high or low. When his hopes are dim or languid, duty, and especially devotion, languishes with them; when they are bright and firm, all duties are pleasant, and all trials tolerable. He has then heart and hand to do and endure the will of God. But when the hopes of a Christian decline and fade away, until he hardly knows what to think of his case, the effect is, that although he will not throw up his profession, nor risk his character, he will not maintain either so well as he did whilst he was sustained by a hope full of immortality. He may still pray in his family and in his closet; but not with a truly devotional spirit. He may still continue regular in his attendance upon all divine ordinances; but he will not come to them with his former relish or [illegible]*tion:* for hope is the very soul of [illegible] and holiness, and therefore they

abound or subside together. Hence the importance and necessity of maintaining the hope of salvation.

Now, it is a curious fact, that the truly serious are the most "slow of heart" to take up, or to keep up, the hope of salvation. They are the last to lay hold of it, and the first to let it go, in their own case. Indeed, real converts are almost the only class who require to be urged to cherish hope. The generality, even of the careless and undecided, hope for salvation, just as they hope for any thing else, as a matter of course. "As I hope to be saved," is the usual mode of expression, when any doubtful assertion is confirmed. Thus it is,—we seldom see a careless man who is afraid to hope for salvation; and we never see a godly man, who has not been afraid to hope for it in his own case. Indeed, it is with a timid heart and a trembling hand, that all true penitents lay hold of the hope of eternal life. Even when they see both their way and their welcome to "the hope set before them" in the Gospel, their sense of utter unworthiness almost unfits them for hoping freely

or fully. And even when they venture to cherish "a good hope through grace," they are almost ashamed and afraid to acknowledge it to others, or, indeed, to themselves. Now, if such timidity and hesitation were as *wise* as they are amiable, it would be wise to let them alone; for any thing that would change them into rashness or flippant boldness would be highly unwise and wicked. They may, however, be removed, without being replaced by presumption or boasting. Paul's humility was not destroyed nor lessened, when he ventured to say of Christ, "He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." In fact, the belief of this deepened his humility, by increasing his happiness. The joy of salvation was "the strength" of his heart, in all the holy principles, in which it was strongest. How did he pass so uncontaminated through a world lying in wickedness; and so unshaken through all the clamour and sophistry of controversy; and so triumphant through all his trials and persecutions? He wore the hope of salvation, *as a helmet* upon his head; and his *understanding* being thus protected against mental

error, his heart and conscience were fortified against temptation. And thus alone can we keep "the faith," or continue the "good fight;" for, without the hope of salvation to guard your judgment, your principles may be so upset or unsettled, by false doctrine, as to yield no enjoyment under trouble, and no strength in the hour of temptation.

It is, I am aware, more common to encourage believers in their work and warfare, by persuading them to *keep up heart*, than by urging them to guard well their understanding and judgment. But the heart cannot be kept up, if the *head* is not kept safe from the assaults of error. Our intellectual powers must be protected, if we would keep our moral powers pure or vigorous; for we cannot *feel* aright, if we *judge* wrong; nor act aright, if we choose wrong; nor maintain a good conscience, if we give way to a disordered imagination. Now, the grand security for a "sound mind," and through that, for a "pure heart," is to "*put on for a helmet the hope of salvation.*" That hope, by entrenching the understanding in the truth of the

Gospel, will best lay and keep open the heart to all the holy and consoling influence of the Gospel.

The point on which these general remarks bear is this; we may be so tempted by infidelity and false doctrines, and get so entangled with doubts or disputes, as to be unable to maintain our ground. Now, as every one cannot pursue that course of reading, nor follow out that train of reasoning, which would clear up all speculative difficulties, it is of the utmost importance to be familiar with some single and simple fact of revelation, which shall be an "anchor to the soul, sure and stedfast," amidst the winds of doctrine, and the fluctuations of opinion; and which shall regulate the mind, as the magnetism of the pole does the motions of the needle. Now, this security is to be found in "the hope of salvation." The man who understands the salvation of God, and cherishes the hope of it, has, within himself, a retreat from which no sophistry nor error can drive or draw him away.

Is he tempted to *Infidelity?* Its objections

may be plausible, and its sarcasms perplexing, to him. He may be unable to answer or to analyze them in detail. They may throw a momentary spell upon his spirit, and a mist on his vision: but he will see, at a glance, and feel with all the keenness of a sensation, that infidelity has nothing to offer, which can be compared with the great salvation it would rob him of. For, if present hope and eternal happiness are his objects, he has securities for them, in the Bible, infinitely stronger than natural religion can give to her votaries for the vague prospects which they cherish. Thus, the moment he looks to the hope of salvation, he perceives that the light of nature reveals no such heaven beyond the grave, nor ratifies any one hope which it is said to inspire. So long, therefore, as eternal happiness is dear to him, his faith in the Gospel is impregnable to all the assaults of scepticism, because he must be a *loser* by that system. Thus, the single and simple reflection,—I could gain nothing, and I might lose all, by relinquishing the Bible,—enables him to possess his soul in patience, amidst all the mysteries

of revelation, and all the wiles of its enemies.

Nor is this all: the man who is familiar with, and confirmed in, the hope of the "great salvation," soon perceives that its *character* is peculiar; so peculiar, that it has no parallel nor semblance in any rival system. He may not know, in detail, the moral character of ancient heathenism, nor the precise nature of that heaven which philosophy dreamt of; but from all that he hears, even from the eulogists of the philosophers, it is self-evident to him that they never *thought* of such a salvation as the Gospel reveals. Indeed, the more he is plied with their boasted discoveries, the more will he feel persuaded, that it never "entered the heart of man to conceive what God hath laid up for them that love him." Thus, the humblest believer is ball-proof against all the array of infidel philosophy; because he has only to observe, that its best morals do not amount, even in theory, to conformity to the Divine image; nor its highest purity to true holinesss; nor its brightest prospects to any thing like the heaven of the Bible. Its very

Platos are vile, when compared with the Apostles of the Lamb, and its Socrateses are but children in their company. In a word, he can find nothing, true or false, in any system of natural religion, which even *borders* upon the sublime idea of a salvation which embraces the sanctification of "soul, body, and spirit," for eternity! All human schemes propose nothing beyond the *amendment* of human nature; for the Gospel alone proposes to make us "*holy as God is holy.*" We have, therefore, in order to be unmoved by all the parade of learned scepticism, only to keep before us the holy character of the great salvation; that, like the spear of Ithuriel, will always detect Satan, even when he transforms himself into an angel of the Light of Nature.

In like manner, Is the Believer tempted to *Unitarianism?* He is perfectly safe, so long as he wears, as a helmet, the hope of that salvation which is revealed in the Gospel. His knowledge of criticism, or of logic, or of ecclesiastical history, may be too slight to assist his faith. But, even if he is unable to draw upon any other source than his English

Bible, the very *heaven* which it reveals will render his faith impregnable to the whole artillery of Socinian learning and sophistry. They may puzzle him with the ambiguities of a figurative text, or set him fast by some sweeping assertion, or perplex him by an appeal to his common sense, which the *uncommon* sense of an angel could not answer by dint of mere reasoning; but still he is safe, and may be triumphant, if he wield the character of the heaven of the Bible manfully. Neither the blustering assertions nor the sleek insinuations of Unitarianism can move him, while he takes his stand on "the sea of glass before the throne;" because, there, he hears songs and sentiments, which give the *lie* direct to both the letter and spirit of Unitarian worship. There, all the armies of heaven, at the same time and in the same terms, adore both God and the Lamb. Their posture is as lowly, and their song as lofty, when they worship the Son, as when they worship the Father. And, in regard to salvation, all "the spirits of just men made perfect" ascribe it entirely and exclusively to

the blood of Christ. Thus, there rushes down from all the hearts and harps of heaven, one uniform and everlasting stream of equal glory to God and the Lamb, and of adoring gratitude for the Atonement. And, then, all this goes forward in the presence, and with the permission, and therefore by the appointment, of God: for neither angels nor saints would dare to worship as they do, in heaven, if it were not *"the will of God"* that they should honour the Son even as they honour the Father; and that the Atonement should have all the glory of salvation. Nothing but the Divine will could establish such worship amongst perfect spirits; and it is self-evident that God would not have willed it, if it were not agreeable to the eternal facts of his nature, and to the moral principles of his government.

Thus the believer has all heaven on his side, in defence of his hope of salvation through the merits of a divine and atoning Saviour. If, therefore, he cannot quote scholar against scholar, nor antiquity against modern upstarts, *nor the* canons of criticism against sciolists,

he can quote the "New Song" against all the reasonings and railings of his opponents, and appeal to "the general assembly" of saints and angels for the truth of his sentiments. That army of the living God cannot, he is sure, mislead nor deceive him; and as he knows, from their example, *what* is the "will" of God in heaven, and *how* it is "done" there, he is equally sure that, whilst adoring God and the Lamb, and glorying only in the Cross, he is doing the will of God "on earth" exactly "as it is done in heaven." Thus the great principles of a Christian's faith are as infallible as the worship of heaven. We have only to keep clearly before our minds the character of the great salvation, which is—that it is *blood-bought*, in order to see at a glance that Unitarianism is as unlike it as Mahometanism is.

In like manner, Is the Believer tempted to *Antinomianism?* He is perfectly safe against all its insinuating snares, while he maintains the hope of that salvation which is revealed in the Gospel. It is a *holy* salvation, if it is any *thing*. A salvation *from* sin, not *in* sin,

How any one can overlook this self-evident fact, is most amazing; for it is written, as with sunbeams, on every principle and promise of the Gospel. It is, however, both overlooked and practically denied by some who profess the firmest attachment to the doctrines of grace. They even boast that the divine law is not binding upon them as a *rule* of life; that they are free to live as they like; that sin can do them no real injury, and that God does not see any iniquity in them! I once heard one of this school declare, from the pulpit, that if he were to go out and commit a *murder*, the sin, although it might bring him to the gallows, would not only not risk his salvation, but it could not for a moment bring even the shadow of a doubt upon his mind as to the certainty of his salvation. In this form, Antinomianism is its own antidote, and any thing but a temptation to believers. This, however, is not the form which it usually assumes: it comes before us speaking great things of Christ and grace, and ascribing all the glory of salvation to them alone. It *almost* professes to open the Lamb's Book of

Life, and to read therein the very names of its adherents. It takes up the case of the weary and heavy-laden sinner, and interprets all his feelings into proofs of his election and eternal justification. It goes into all the worst workings of the heart, and teaches those who are conscious of them, that they must be the children of God, because they notice these things. Now, as all the truly serious are conscious of much indwelling sin, and of many imperfections; and as these things often destroy or damp their hope of salvation; and as they naturally wish to feel assured of their safety;—it is a strong temptation to them, when any one offers to prove their election from the very facts which lead them to *doubt* it. And the proposal to do so is the more plausible, because the pretence is, that the sole design is to exalt the Saviour and to humble the sinner—to glorify God, and give peace through the blood of the Cross—to endear the everlasting Covenant, and honour the Eternal Spirit. All this is so like the glorious Gospel, and *embraces so* much of its grand design, that *one can hardly* think of suspecting its truth or

its tendency. And, as the truly serious do not intend to apply this offered relief to any bad purpose, but merely to get over their doubts and fears by it; and as they wish for no liberty to sin;—this easy and speedy way of reaching assurance becomes very tempting to them, especially if they are under a ministry which does not clearly show them "a better way." For the fact is, an awakened conscience and a wounded spirit will seek relief somewhere; and, if they do not find it in low doctrinal sentiments, they will grasp at it in high, and take it from any thing rather than sink into despair. If, therefore, they find that the ministry which has wounded, does not heal them, and that it makes salvation by faith appear quite as difficult to obtain as salvation by *works* would be, and thus brings them no nearer to their object; it is no wonder if they try another ministry, and even welcome one which turns their doubts and perplexities, as well as their desires, into proofs of faith and tokens of safety.

It is in this way that many are drawn into *Antinomian* principles. Their object, at first,

was simply to get hold of something which would give rest to their souls; and, as that kind of preaching which makes saving faith appear quite as impossible as perfect obedience, did not relieve them, but rather tantalized them by a remedy which, whilst it was called *free*, was kept back until their works should demonstrate their faith, they were glad to grasp at any thing which promised speedier relief. Accordingly, when they were assured that their fears, and desires, and even their very doubts, were the work of the Spirit in them; and that his work *in* the soul is the *warrant* to believe that the death of Christ and the decree of God were for the soul;—this nostrum met all their difficulties. For as they could say, with perfect truth, that they felt and desired under the Gospel as they had never done before; and as this state of mind was declared to be the effect of Divine influence, and thus a proof of their election and redemption;—such doctrine might well please them. But, at this stage of their experience, the Gospel itself would have pleased them better, if it had been as plainly brought

before them; because, then, they were in search of nothing but the hope of salvation, and wanted no relief from the rules, but only from the *curse*, of the law. Had they, therefore, been directed, at that moment, to the Divine testimony concerning the person and work of Christ; and had they been shown clearly, from the Scriptures, that the cordial belief of that testimony is saving faith; and that faith itself warrants immediate hope;—this would have met all their difficulties, without laying asleep their watchfulness, or their fear of sin.

Well: you see all this, if you have taken up the hope of salvation at the Cross, simply by relying on Christ for it. You have, therefore, no occasion to meddle with the unscriptural nostrums of those who put the work of the Spirit in the room of the work of Christ, and give that place to election which the Cross alone occupies in the Gospel. You have no occasion to shift the position of things in the "well-ordered" Covenant, before you can enter into the ark of it. "Ye have not so learned Christ," from these pages, as to feel *it necessary* to have another warrant than the

Word of God, for believing on Christ for your own justification. Whatever comfort you want, you can find it more readily and more abundantly in the single fact, that "He who believeth hath eternal life," than in all the boasted consolations of Antinomianism,—the very first principle of which is wrong, inasmuch as it substitutes feelings for faith. And whenever you want to see the grand fallacy and infamy of this system, you have only to observe that the very *first* promise of that new Covenant which it pretends to venerate so much, is at utter and eternal variance with the rejection of the law as a rule of life. That first promise is, "*I will put my laws in their hearts, and write them in their minds, saith the Lord:*" a fact which is fatal to all unholy applications of the doctrines of grace. In a word, real Antinomianism is the hope of a salvation *from* that holy salvation which is "the end" of election, redemption, and regeneration.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. VIII.

DEVOTIONAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

No man *knows* himself, who is not in the habit of *examining* himself; and no man examines himself impartially, who does not place himself under the omniscient eye of God, and thus invite and submit to Divine scrutiny. Our hearts are too deep to be fathomed by our conscience, and too deceitful to be unmasked by our judgment. Indeed, the heart can blind and pervert both the judgment and the conscience. Hence the necessity of carrying the whole soul to be searched and tried by God, even after all our efforts to examine ourselves: for, until we are alone and upon our knees before the Searcher of hearts, we are both liable and sure to impose on *ourselves*. We may, indeed, know, from

observation and experience, what is our weak side, or our besetting sin, and thus have a general idea of our real character; but how weak that side is, or how strong that sin is, we are not fully aware, until we look at them in the light of God. Accordingly, we have found them to be greater, and have been betrayed by them oftener, than we suspected at first. They have carried us further than we calculated upon, and led us into more wrong steps than we intended, at first. Yes; and both our weak side and our besetting sin, if left to themselves, are quite capable of hurrying us as much beyond any evil which we now fear, as they were of drawing us into those evils which we now deplore. For, what our hearts are thus led to by their own propensities, is only a specimen of the *directions*, rather than of the *lengths*, they are inclined to go, when allowed to take their own way. Now, if we must say already, that our hearts have gone too far astray; and if we believe that they are naturally "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;"—it is high time to take

measures for the prevention and cure of their evil tendencies. And, for these purposes, the habit of *self-examination* in the sight of the omniscient God, is equally necessary and useful.

David furnishes an example of this devotional habit, which will illustrate at once these introductory hints. He was an attentive observer and scrutinizer of himself, especially after his restoration to the Divine favour. From that time his "soul" was, as it were, "continually in his hand;" his "spirit made diligent search;" he "communed" with his own heart, even "upon his bed," and considered his ways. Now, this was self-examination, in the ordinary sense of the duty; but he did not stop there. He knew and believed the deceitfulness of his heart too well to trust its verdict in his own cause; and, therefore, followed up his own scrutiny by praying, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Thus, that there might be no deception, he solemnly

put his case into the hands, and under the eye, of God. This was impartial, because devotional, self-examination.

Having referred to this example, as an illustration of the subject, it may be well to glance at the principles of it. Now, the prayer, "Search me and try me," recognizes, as an unquestionable truth, the omniscience of Jehovah, and proceeds upon the solemn fact, that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." It was, however, by realizing the scrutiny of this omniscience in his *own* case, that David understood how it extended to all creatures, times, and places. "Thou hast searched and known me,"—is the point from which he started, in his way to the sublime and awful conclusion, "The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." And the conclusion is just; for if David's heart, in all its recesses, were naked and open unto God, all hearts and all things must be equally visible to Him; because the *power* which can search one, can search all; and the *reason* for searching any heart, holds good in the case of all hearts.

God is the Judge of all; and, as the secrets of every heart will be brought into judgment, none can escape his notice. Each may, therefore, say for himself, "*Lord, thou hast searched and known me:*" others may *guess* what I am, from what I seem; and argue from what my life is, what my heart must be: *but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether;* thou art not deceived, nor at any loss, whoever may be so!"

Now, with this solemn conviction clinging to him like his shadow—why did David pray thus, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts?" He had just acknowledged that God *had* done so already, and fully; for he does not say, Search me *more* than thou hast ever done. The reason is obvious: God searches all; but he does not *lead* all "in the way everlasting." Some are given up to their own hearts' lusts, and thus led captive by the devil, at his will, when they refuse to be led by the Spirit. David knew this: and, as his object was to walk in the way of salvation, his prayer was, that that he might be so searched as to

escape every "wicked way." And there *is* a special and gracious searching of the heart, the *results* of which God shows to them who fear Him; thus discovering *to* them, what he discovers *in* them. Not, indeed, that He shows them at once all that He sees in them: the most holy could not sustain the full sight of all the plagues of their own hearts. God, therefore, reveals them gradually to his people, that the appalling sight may not overwhelm their hopes of sanctification. He does, however, show so much, from time to time, as to convince believers that their own hearts are not to be trusted, even to their own *examination;* but require, in order to be upright in all things, to be searched by the eye of Omniscience.

Now, it is a good sign, when we are afraid of self-deception, and court the scrutiny of God; when we are willing to know the worst of our own case, and desirous to judge impartially; and when, for this purpose, we call in the eye of God to search us. For, by thus *examining* ourselves, and submitting to Divine *examination,* Believers are distinguished,

First, From the FORMALIST, who takes no notice of the state of his heart in religion. It is, indeed, strange that any can be so infatuated, as to forget the necessity of worshipping a Spirit, "in spirit and in truth:" but, alas! it is forgotten and overlooked. Many, like the Jews of old, go to the sanctuary of God, and "sit as his people sit, and hear as they hear; but their hearts are far from him." This is no sweeping charge; for, if their hearts were "right with God," they would worship him at *home* as well as in the sanctuary; and in the sanctuary by *sacraments*, as well as by prayer or praise. But how few compass the family or the sacramental altar, or retire to pray in secret to Him who seeth in secret! All this may, indeed, be done, by mere formalists; but, when all this is neglected, there certainly is none of the "power" of godliness, nor any habit of self-examination. It is, therefore, a good sign, when the claims of all duties are seriously weighed, and the state of the heart towards and in them is chiefly regarded. This distinguishes Believers,

Secondly, From the RECKLESS PROFESSOR, who dare not search his own heart. Some have the hardihood to continue at the sacrament, even after they have discovered that their convictions were not conversion, nor their first resolutions, principles. They depart from their closets, and give up the power of godliness; but there is no departure from the Lord's Table. Conscience says to them, "Keep back, or begin on new principles;" and thus, like Balaam's angel, waves a drawn sword between them and a sacrament for which they have no relish; but pride says, "Keep your place and your name; defeat suspicion, by defying it; keep up appearances, whatever it cost, for it is too mortifying to expose yourself by your own act of withdrawing!" Now, in such a case, the heart dare not examine itself before God, but is afraid of its own whispers, and conscious that a full disclosure of its secrets, even to itself, would be almost as humiliating as the exposure of them to others. Thus, the matter will not *bear thinking of,* and therefore appearances

are kept up at all hazards, by shutting the eyes upon the hazards.

This fearful state of mind must not, however, be confounded with those occasional misgivings of heart, which the serious feel in regard to the reality of their own conversion, and their right to the sacrament. There is an immense difference between habitual recklessness and occasional disrelish; especially when the want of relish is deeply deplored, and the causes of it are searched out. All is not wrong, while self-examination is kept up, and while what is wrong is dreaded and hated. Like an erring, but affectionate, child, a believer may feel himself in disgrace; but, while he feels out of his element, and is trying to return into his rest, his case is not hopeless, because it is not heartless nor heedless. In like manner, the habit of self-examination in the presence of God distinguishes its adherents, *Thirdly*, from the INCONSISTENT Professor, who is unwilling to be led out of every "wicked way." David prayed thus—"See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead

me in the way everlasting." Thus he was so jealous of his heart, that he suspected that some wicked way would be overlooked, unless God prevented it. Now, this is the grand characteristic of "faith unfeigned,"—it is impartial, and willing to be kept back from all sin. A real Christian may, indeed, feel a strong bias to some of his old sins, and a shrinking from some duties; and, alas! for a time, he may even risk the experiment of serving "two masters" by turns: but when he finds,—which he soon does by bitter experience,—that *half* measures will not do, and that a divided heart misses enjoyment in religion, and that yielding to temptation or sloth is destruction to hope and peace,—he is glad to retrace his steps to the narrow way again, and to yield himself unreservedly to God and duty. Now, although this is not done without a struggle, nor always soon,—it is done eventually by all who are attentive to their own hearts, and to the baneful influence of *inconsistencies* upon them. The self-*examining* believer determines to be consistent,

whatever it cost in effort or sacrifice. He would rather *suffer*, than sin against God and a good conscience. Now, this high and holy tone of gracious principle and godly practice, is acquired chiefly by scrutinizing the heart in the presence of God. It is not acquired from the social intercourse of Christian friends, nor even from heart-searching sermons: these, indeed, suggest the necessity of self-examination, and are the chief means of leading to it; but it is in the *act* of devotional examination, that God shows with "power" what is wrong, and with "glory" what is right. Accordingly, it was in the closet, and whilst retired within ourselves, and whilst realizing the presence of God, and whilst looking at all sin in the light of Eternity,—it was whilst thus engaged, that every sin, fault, and wrong habit, rose before us in hideous and horrid deformity! Then we wept, and wondered that we ever thought lightly of "any wicked way;" and felt our souls swelling up in holy indignation against all vice and vanity.

And, by the same process, we acquired

those clear and affecting views of the way of holiness, which won us into it. Whilst we looked at "the narrow way," in the company of those who shun it, or in the light of worldly maxims, we thought it too narrow, and saw many lions in the way, and felt as if it were impossible to walk in it: but when we retired to our closets, and betook ourselves to prayer, that we might examine and weigh these mingled feelings and objections, which looked so formidable in company,—the path of holiness expanded before us as it really is—guarded by eternal Providence, gilded with great and precious promises, graced by the presence of many illustrious pilgrims, glorious with the footsteps of the Saviour himself, and terminating directly in the heaven of heavens. We saw, also, that none sank on "the way everlasting," nor perished at the end of it, who kept in it; and that those were happiest who adhered to it most strictly; and that all were ruined who forsook it: and, between this twofold "cloud of witnesses," we resolved to follow holiness. Thus we have often come from our closets, saying to ourselves, "Let

whoever will, try dangerous experiments, the example of the Saviour shall be our guiding pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night: our hearts are "fixed" by searching, and we will "follow the Lamb in the path of regeneration."

It is thus that the habit of devotional self-examination sets and keeps both sin and duty in their true light. It is, however, wanted for other purposes. Accordingly, God says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates;" that is, without proof of the Saviour's presence. The word "Reprobates" is not used here in the modern sense. It means now, in common language, "reckless profligates," or "abandoned sinners;" and is suspected by some, who judge the sense from the sound of it, to countenance the doctrine of *Reprobation*, as they call it. They mean by that, the ruin and loss of the soul by the sovereign *decree* of God;—a doctrine not even breathed in the Bible. *What it* teaches is, the judicial reprobation of

those who weary out the patience of God by impenitence and rebellion. Such he abandons eventually to a reprobate mind, and to a seared conscience, and to their own hearts' lusts; and thus to ruin. But the ruin comes not from a sovereign decree, but from the sentence of the law and the sanctions of the Gospel. This is the real state of the case; and therefore a man is not a reprobate, in *this* sense, even if he is not in the faith yet, and although Christ is not in him. I mean, that he is not, on that account, *decreed* to ruin, nor given up by God. All unbelievers are, indeed, condemned already; but it is because of unbelief, and not beyond redemption.

This being understood, the most timid have no occasion to shrink from examining themselves by the test applied to the Corinthians: for even if you should not be able to prove, to your own satisfaction, that you are in the faith, nor that Christ is in you—still, whilst Christ is upon the throne of grace, and whilst faith is the gift of God, your case is not hopeless. *This*, however, is but the lowest view of *the case*. Those who are in real earnest to be

found in Christ, are not utter strangers either to the exercise of faith or to the indwelling of Christ in the heart. They may be afraid to call their own believing, faith; and may not understand the precise meaning of Christ's indwelling presence: but it does not follow, from these mistakes, that they are without proofs of faith or love. They have often more proofs of both than they imagine, or are aware of, until they examine themselves. —Now, so may you. The first sight of the question, "Am I in the faith?" may startle you; because, knowing faith to be the point on which salvation turns, and feeling your own unworthiness of so great a salvation, you are afraid to say, *Yes*. But, observe: you are equally afraid to say, *No*. You leave the question unanswered in words; but you continue to *act* as if you were "in the faith." You do not cease to hope, even when you hesitate to say that you believe. You even strive to *live* as a believer, although you do not venture to assume the name. Yea, more: no one could persuade you to *give up your habits* of looking to, and leaning upon

the Saviour. You shrink with horror from the bare idea of disowning or deserting him. You have no wish to forsake him; and when you feel tempted to do so, your unfeigned answer is, "Lord, to whom shall I go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life." Accordingly, since you saw your need of an interest in his blood, and felt the value of salvation, you have been unwilling and unable to forget Christ. Thoughts of him, and desires after him, have followed you like your shadow, more or less, every day; and nothing would please you more than to be able to think and feel in regard to him, as you wish.

Well: this being the case, you cannot begin too soon to "examine" whether you "be in the faith;" for the result is sure to be favourable. Yes; examination in the sight of God will discover to you, that it has been given to you, on behalf of Christ, to believe on him with the heart unto salvation. But nothing else will discover this unto your *permanent* satisfaction. You may gather, from *these marks* of faith, a general idea that you *are in the* faith; but the conclusion, even if

just, will not last long. It must be drawn upon your knees, and with your heart bared to the inspection of God, if you would have it lasting. And, in his presence, as in the prospect of death, the question, "Am I in the faith?" is fairly met. The soul dare not trifle nor equivocate, when placed under the eye of Omniscience; but must go fully into the inquiry. It spreads and pours itself out all over the question. And when, in this light, it is seen that the cordial belief of the Gospel, for holy purposes, is saving faith; and when it is felt, through all the soul, that we do believe its truth, and love its holiness;—our satisfaction is unspeakable! For then, we know and feel persuaded that we are not flattering ourselves, nor judging rashly. The whole matter is so fully laid before God, and God is so fully before our minds, that self-deception seems impossible. We have "the witness" in ourselves, that, like the first believers, we "gladly receive" the Gospel. We are, indeed, amazed, and thrown into almost breathless silence, during these hallowed moments, to find that believing is faith,

and that faith itself warrants the hope of salvation *there* and *then*. But we *do* find all this to be true! All our recollections, both of the letter and spirit of the Scriptures, rush in to confirm it. The whole Bible rises before us as one brilliant and unbroken illustration of the grand fact—that salvation "is of faith, that it might be by grace." And, having seen all this in the light of the Divine presence, we retire from our closets with the old apostolic melody in our hearts and lips, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God."

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. IX.

THE TEMPTATIONS AND FIERY DARTS OF SATAN.

AMONGST those words with which the truly serious associate the most awful and alarming ideas, the word TEMPTATION is one of the chief. And well it may make every ear tingle, and every heart tremble! Temptation is, indeed, thought of, and spoken of, lightly, by the bulk of mankind: but this is no proof that they who do so are superior to it, or that they resist it. Many strong men,—yea, many mighty men,—have fallen by it. Men! yea, ANGELS, have been overthrown by it in the very heaven of heavens. Even their immortal powers and celestial advantages were not a sufficient balance to the weight of temptation. *Like* a serpent, it wound itself around the

pillars of their thrones of light, coiled its folds upon their harps of gold, crept into their bosom; and having thus drawn aside a third part of the stars of heaven, it hurled them, at one sweep, into "the blackness of darkness for ever." The man, therefore, who thinks so lightly of temptation as not to be afraid of it, ought to place himself, in idea, amongst these once "morning stars," whilst they shone around the eternal throne as emanations of the Father of lights, and served him day and night without weariness: and whilst witnessing them singing and shining in their bright orbits, and all linked unto God as if they had been rays of his glory; he would then see and feel what strength, what motives, what innocence, temptation could overmatch and overwhelm. And then, let him look to the dark and desolate orbits of those fallen morning stars; to their present chains of darkness, and to their future prospects;—and if, after this survey of heaven and hell, he is still not afraid of temptation, he must surely suspect that he *is less than* a man, or fancy himself to be *more than* an angel.

All this, however, although the strongest, is not the most affecting, light in which to view our own danger from temptation. Which of the mightiest human names has not temptation left a stain and a stigma upon? Noah?—Ah, you recollect his wine. Abraham?—His equivocation. Moses?—His impatience. Aaron?—His unbelief. Jacob?—His stratagem. The Patriarchs?—Their treatment of Joseph. Elijah?—His murmuring. David?—His fall. Hezekiah?—His ostentation. Jonah?—His rebellion. Peter?—His denial of Christ. And if these mighty men fell, let him that standeth take heed lest *he* fall also. Let not him that putteth on the harness, boast himself as he who putteth off. We shall not be fully beyond the reach of all danger, until we are fairly through the valley of the shadow of death; for even in it, the fiery darts of Satan sometimes fly thick and flash dreadfully. Only when we are "clean over" the swellings of Jordan, will there be "nothing" in us for Satan to work upon.

Were, indeed, simplicity of heart, and gra*cious* principles, preventatives, or absolute

safeguards, against all temptations, some might escape; but even *innocence*, in Eden, was not an effectual shield against the fiery darts of Satan. Innocence! even incarnate *divinity*, was not exempt from assault, though superior to seduction; for the Saviour was assailed and harassed by Satan, until his human nature required angels to minister unto its exhausted strength.

Some who readily subscribe to the truth of all this, do it for a bad purpose, and argue thus:—"If such men fell, we cannot be expected to stand always, nor to exceed them in resisting the devil." But this is mere sophistry and self-deception; for those who fell, fell by no necessity but what they themselves created. Satan has power to say, "Cast thyself down!" but he has not power to *throw* down any one who is doing "all to stand." Had Noah been as watchful after planting a vineyard, as before, he would not have fallen by wine. Had David made and kept such "a covenant with his eyes" as Job did, he would *not have coveted* his "neighbour's wife." Had *Peter confined* himself to the company of his

fellow-disciples, he would not have been in the same danger of denying his Master with *oaths*, as when he mingled with the enemies of Christ. Besides, one chief cause of the fall of these otherwise good men, was, that they evidently never allowed themselves to suspect that they were in *danger* of falling by such temptations. It is highly probable, that had any one warned them against the sins which overcame them, each of them would have said, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Thus, there are two things necessary, in order to resist temptation successfully;—doing all to stand, and being afraid of falling; for if we are not afraid of falling, we shall not take unto ourselves "the *whole* armour of God," that we may be "able to stand."

Amongst those temptations of Satan to which we are chiefly exposed, and which are emphatically his "fiery darts," one is, the temptation to ATHEISM or INFIDELITY. Now, whenever the horrid suspicion that there is "no God," or that the Bible is not to be *depended* on, comes in like a flood upon the

mind, it is a fiery dart of Satan; and he alone has the *guilt* of it, whilst the mind hates or deplores it. Unless, indeed, we have been exposing ourselves by reading sceptical books, and listening to scorners; then, the guilt of of infidel thoughts is chiefly our own. But when they are thrown into the soul unsought and unawares, and thrown after the soul when it is retreating from them,—the *archer*, and not the "wounded spirit," is the criminal, in that case. We are personally accountable only for those temptations which we court, connive at, or yield to. The Saviour was tempted of the devil to impatience, presumption, and idolatry; but as he had not exposed himself to these fiery darts, and did not yield to them, but repelled them, he was nowise accountable for them.

This distinction is strongly stated; but it is wanted, in all its strength, when the mind is overwhelmed by distracting doubts of the being of God or the truth of revelation. In that case, it seems to ourselves improbable, if *not impossible*, that we had ever believed "*with the* heart;" seeing that now we ar

almost ready to give up faith in God, and to regard all things as a chaos of mere chance! We argue thus: "Surely, if I had been taught by the Spirit of God, and at all renewed in the spirit of my own mind, I should be incapable of harbouring or starting such atheistical thoughts. They would not surely come into 'a new heart.' Are they not symptoms of a reprobate mind?" This, however, is a mistake; they are "the fiery darts" of Satan, and not the *real* sentiments of our own minds. Accordingly, we do not think these doubts well-founded. We do not wish them to be *true*. Nothing would pain us so much as finding that there was no God, or no Bible, or no hereafter! However much, therefore, we may be harassed by these dark suspicions, they are not our sin, but our misfortune, so long as we shrink from them, and try to shake them off. At the same time, we are not *altogether* blameless in this matter; for, had we acquainted and familiarized ourselves more fully with the EVIDENCES of natural and revealed religion, Satan would not have found *it so easy* to unsettle our thoughts. Hence

the importance of preventing the return of this temptation, by acquiring a more full and connected view of the grounds of faith.

Another "fiery dart" of Satan's is, the temptation to BLASPHEMY. Now, although every thing is not blasphemy, which is called so by custom, we are not wrong in regarding, as blasphemous, all those thoughts which *impeach* the character or the government of God. There are things in both which clash with our natural ideas of propriety; and, when they clash with our inclinations too, Satan can so magnify what we *dislike* in the Divine character and government, that we are in great danger of thinking and speaking against God. "I do well to be angry," said Jonah, when God caused his gourd to wither. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain," said Asaph, when he saw that the "ungodly" prospered in the world, and that he himself was "chastened every morning." Now, all these things happen still, and Satan turns them into strong temptations when they happen to ourselves. [illegible]urds of our shelter and solace wither [illegible]es in a night, and we are left exposed

and lonely, whilst the gourds of the ungodly are almost evergreens: or *our* plans and undertakings are unsuccessful, whilst those who have no fear of God before their eyes seem to have everything their own way, and sometimes more than heart could wish. Thus, between the apparent inequalities of Providence and our own actual sufferings, we are tempted to murmur, and, at times, almost to arraign the *justice* of God. Indeed, there are moments of such agitation, when Satan aggravates these calamities, that the heart seems to harden under them, and the soul to become reckless of consequences. Who has not felt that fiery dart flash across a wounded spirit,—"Let God do his worst; for I cannot be more miserable than I am already?" These are awful moments, when the soul is almost ready to take its swing amongst all the risks of time and eternity, and, like the "unjust judge," to give up both the fear of God and regard for man! Oh! it is well that, when Satan comes in such "great wrath," his time is short: and it is *better*, that the Good Shepherd holds his tempted and terrified sheep so, that the roaring lion cannot

devour them, nor pluck them out of their Shepherd's hand.

At such moments, indeed, we hardly venture to regard ourselves as the sheep of Christ: we seem to ourselves *goats*, going to his "left hand," of our own accord, and "before our time." Accordingly, it is not until we come to our "right mind" again, that we can even join his flock in the green pastures of Zion. "But," it may be said, "can any sheep or lamb of the Saviour's flock sink into such reckless desperation even for a moment?" Perhaps, not *sink* into it; but they may be *goaded* into it by the fiery darts of Satan. Indeed, when the character of God comes to be judged of by his trying *dispensations*, instead of his dispensations being judged of by his *character*, Satan finds that in the heart, to work upon, which can soon wind it up to desperation. Those who have never seen much of real life, or never looked at it closely, may be astonished at this. It is, however, only too true: and hence the necessity of a settled conviction in our minds, that God must not be judged of by our trials.

Job saw and felt this, when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And we have always reason to do so, whatever be our calamities; for, even when he chastises in anger, the anger is not mixed with *hatred*, but with love. Whenever, therefore, Satan suggests, from our afflictions, any reflection or charge against the Divine character, we ought immediately to shut our hearts against it; and, as those who are conscious of loving God, to answer, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for all things work together for good to them that love God!"

It is not, however, in times of calamity only, that Satan hurls his fiery darts against the soul. The temptation to find fault with the SOVEREIGNTY of Grace, is often greatest when Providence is most smiling; at least, when it is not adverse. Satan seems then to envy the pleasure which the fearers of God find in the ways of God; and, as he cannot forge fiery darts out of their lot then, he often draws them from the *decrees* of God. How far we ourselves are naturally prone to pry *into* "secret things," and to tamper with the

abstract question of personal *election*, I do not stop to inquire now. One thing is certain, that, whether prone or averse, almost all serious minds get entangled more or less with the question at times. Who has not felt his thoughts drawn into some such track as the following:—"True: I am now more reconciled to the salvation and service of God than I once was; I am even willing to walk in the narrow way which leadeth unto life;—but eternal life 'is not of him that *willeth*, nor of him that *runneth*, but of God that showeth *mercy;* and He will have mercy only upon whom he *will* have mercy.' If, therefore, I am not *elected*—neither my willing nor my running can avail me. I may be lost at last, whatever I do! Oh! why is *sovereignty* the rule of mercy?"

Whenever Satan can get the soul this length in questioning or suspecting the good will of God, he soon entangles it in a labyrinth of rash or dark speculations, which harden or horrify the mind. I state this in *general terms*, because it would be improper *to embody*, in express words, all the dreadful

surmises and charges against God, which rise up in the mind at such times. Those who have felt them need no remembrancer, and those who are strangers to them cannot be too long ignorant of them. When, however, the question of personal election is born in, and bound upon, the soul like a heavy chain, which checks and weighs down hope; and when "the iron enters into the soul," so that it knows not what to do or what to think;—the best thing which can be done in such a case is, to ask the simple question, "Has ever any one found out his own election by *brooding* over the matter as I am doing? Many have acquired a cheering persuasion that their names were 'written in the Lamb's Book of Life:' did they obtain the hope of this by such a process as I am pursuing? I am afraid to pray, and have no heart to use the ordinary means of grace; because I am not sure what will be the issue. Was this Paul's plan? Was this the line of conduct which the Apostles pointed out to inquirers? No!— It cannot, therefore, lead me to the point I *wish* to reach. I have, indeed, instead of

trying to enter into 'the secret of the Lord' by the 'door,' been trying to 'climb up some other way.' This is wrong!"

Are you, then, persuaded that it is wrong? Well; consider again, that none of all whom you have known to die in the Lord, or know to be the Lord's, had any knowledge of their own election when they *first* fled to Christ, and began to follow him. Whatever they know now, they were for a time as ignorant on this point as you can be; and whatever they have found out, was discovered in the path of duty, and nowise apart from the use of the Scriptures. Ask them—and they will tell you so. Do you, then, really imagine that it is necessary, or that it would be wise, to reveal to *you* a matter which, for a time, is kept hid from all the heirs of salvation? Must God, to humour your curiosity, alter his plan of acting under the Gospel? The old and usual plan has done well enough for millions and myriads who had both more to do *and to suffer* than you have. I do not underrate *your trials* nor your perplexities; but I must *remind you* that better soldiers have had to

fight and die upon the bare ground of *hope*; so that, if you will not begin the spiritual warfare without assurance, you will never begin at all.

Besides; do consider that, if you had the assurance of your own personal election, it would not alter the path of duty in the least. It would unbind nothing that is binding on Christians. It would not prevent trials, nor exempt you from temptations. It would, indeed, I grant, cheer you in the path of duty and suffering, to know that you were chosen and called to eternal life; and thus, although not absolutely necessary to your success, it is certainly desirable for your comfort. I will even go farther, and affirm (for the word of God bears me out in doing so) that you will do and suffer the will of God better when you know your election of God. But, if you really want to know it for *holy* purposes, it is not such a secret as you have hitherto imagined, nor as you were sure to find it from the *way* you took to discover it.

In fact, it is *not* a secret at all, so far as it *regards* those who have fled to Christ for a

holy salvation: they are the elect of God. All that "love God" are "the called according to his purpose." This is expressly *revealed*, for their satisfaction on the point. If, therefore, it be a secret to you, it is so, either because you have not observed this simple fact, or because you still doubt the sincerity of your own faith and love. The scriptural fact, however, is now before you:—all true Believers are the elect of God; and, therefore, whatever reason you have to regard yourself as a Believer, is proof of your personal election. You have no occasion to perplex yourself with the abstract question, if you are conscious of loving God and the Lamb; for love to them settles the whole question in your case, and in all cases where love is genuine. What you have to do, therefore, is simply to ascertain the sincerity of your faith and love; and that may be soon done, if you take care to distinguish between *weakness* and *insincerity*, and between *imperfection* and *pretence*. Now, you know that your avowals of faith and love at the *mercy-seat*, and your desires for their increase,

are not *pretences,* but the unfeigned language of your heart addressed to the Searcher of hearts. Well; his language to you is express,—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." And let this be your answer to all the counter-suggestions of Satan.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. X.

THE FLUCTUATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FEELING AND ENJOYMENT.

THERE are few things more distressing or discouraging to a serious mind, than the unsteadiness of its own feelings. These change so often and so much, that we hardly know what to think of ourselves, at times. We wish to be feelingly alive to the glories of the Saviour and salvation—to the solemnities of death and eternity—and to the claims of duty and devotion; but, somehow, the impression of these great realities is not abiding. —It seems often "ready to vanish away" from our minds. And yet, at times, the *impression* of eternal things is very deep. Occasionally, it seizes upon, and sinks into,

the heart so fully, that we could not *throw* it off if we would; and yet it soon passes off, even against our will. We do not *intend* to forget divine things, nor to become formal in religious duties; but, alas! we often do both, and find ourselves almost estranged from God and godliness: so treacherous and changeable is the human mind, even after it has felt much of the power of truth and eternity!

This melancholy fact naturally gives rise to a suspicion in our own breasts, that, whatever we have experienced, we are not yet truly converted to God; for it seems impossible to reconcile these sad changes of feeling with the possession of "the root of the matter." All our ordinary ideas of "a new heart and a right spirit," include the necessity of more habitual steadiness of purpose and strength of spiritual feeling. Accordingly, our relapses into deadness and formality induce a doubt, if not of our sincerity, of our conversion; and thus all our pleasing hopes, which were drawn from the consciousness of relying on Christ for a holy salvation, are almost upset, *at times*. They seem unwarranted in our

case, because our feelings are inconsistent with them, and with all our ideas of the saving work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. The consequence is,—we are often ready to conclude that we were too hasty in taking up the hope of salvation, and in giving ourselves credit for being converted characters. We are almost persuaded, at times, that it would have been better to have waited longer, before venturing to avow our religious feelings to the world or to the church. We may not exactly *repent* of having said that we were in good earnest about the salvation of our souls; but we have wished that we had said less, and thought more, on the subject.

In this painful dilemma many find themselves, and hardly know what to do or think in their own case. The sad unsteadiness of their religious feelings and resolutions *keeps* some back from the sacrament, and almost *forces* others away from it. One class are afraid to come, and another equally afraid to continue. The former are not easy in their *absence from* it, nor the latter easy in their *attendance on* it: and both, whilst in this

unhappy state of mind, derive but little benefit from the other ordinances of grace.

Such being the fact of this case, it is of immense importance to both classes, that the subject of Fluctuating Religious Feelings should be cleared up to them without reserve or delay. It is, however, a subject equally delicate and difficult; for any view of it which would lead the serious to think lightly of the evil of dead or cold frames of mind, would do far more injury than these frames themselves. For, bad as they are in themselves, and in their influence upon Christian character, they are not so baneful as a heedless disregard to the state of the heart. He who trembles at the treachery of his own heart, is *humbled*, as well as hindered, by it; whereas he who is reconciled to a vacant mind and a worldly spirit, and thus reckless how he feels, is sure to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. The mourner over the plagues of his own heart will, at least, not increase them; but the man who regards them as mere matters of course, and *thus allows* them to take their swing, will

soon bring them out from the centre of his heart to the surface of his life.

Such being my own personal convictions, and, as far as I can ascertain it, the actual result of general experience on this subject, I am not likely to lessen either your fear or hatred of those melancholy changes of feeling which now pain and perplex you. I cannot, indeed, join with you in regarding them as utterly incompatible or inconsistent with the existence of saving faith in the heart; but I am fully prepared to regard them, in reference to the spiritual health of the *soul*, as indicating, what similar bodily symptoms imply, the presence of *disease*. Now, all is not right, but much wrong, with the body, when there is a frequent loss of appetite, or a loathing of natural food, or a disposition to lethargy. In each of these cases there is abundant reason for fear and care. Accordingly, we are both fearful and careful, when such symptoms show themselves. But, even when they are most alarming, we never imagine that they disprove *the former* existence of life or health. Such *an idea is* too absurd to be admitted for a

moment. Well; in like manner, the loss of spiritual appetite and relish does not prove that we never had any. In fact, it just proves the contrary: for as we know, from having enjoyed bodily health, that there is a change for the worse when appetite fails; so the felt and deplored loss of relish for divine things, proves that they were once enjoyed by the soul. Hence Job's piercing lamentation, "*Oh, that it were with me as in months past!*" is as much proof that "the candle of the Lord" had shone upon him, as that it was then eclipsed.

Parallels between natural and spiritual life and health are, I am fully aware, hazardous grounds of argument, when the object is to ascertain a point so solemn as the conversion of the soul to God: for almost any bodily action or emotion proves the existence of natural life to a certainty; whereas there may be many moral feelings, which, although they resemble spiritual feelings in some things, do not amount to spiritual life. There are, perhaps, very few persons, amongst those *who have sat* under a faithful ministry of the

Gospel, who have not felt both alarmed and allured, at times, by the appeals of the pulpit. It is not even uncommon to find persons completely enraptured, for some months or weeks, with a ministry which is full of Christ and grace, and so spiritual withal, that it seems impossible to love it without loving the Saviour at the same time. But all this, we know, may be done without even leading to secret prayer. In like manner, it is quite possible to take a very lively interest in religious duties, and to be much pleased, for a considerable time, with prayer-meetings and spiritual conversation; and yet to remain unregenerate all the time. This is often proved, by the return of such persons to their old habits of indifference and neglect. But here is the difference between them and the truly serious:—the former are not sorry to give up their new habits, nor unwilling to return to their old ways; but rather glad, than otherwise, to rid themselves of religious restraints: whereas the latter cannot bear the idea of going back to *the world*, nor feel easy when their hearts are *becoming* worldly. There may be sad changes

for the worse, in the state of their feelings; but these make their heart sad, and humble them before God. They count it no gain, but a heavy, heavy *loss*, to get free from the holy influence of any religious principle or motive. It is no pleasure to them, but an acute pain, to feel that either the Gospel or the law is losing any of its authority over them. In a word, it is their chief burden and terror to feel less affected by divine things than at first.

Now when this is the real state of the case, and when, in connexion with this sense of loss and sin, there is a deep desire to return to the love and liveliness of former days, the changes do not disprove the reality of the faith or conversion of such mourners in Zion. Lukewarmness and the loss of relish in the service of God and the Lamb, prove, indeed, *much* against such mourners; but they do not prove them to be Unbelievers, far less hypocrites. Bad frames of mind demonstrate that there has been some bad habit or temper indulged, or not sufficiently watched against; and that there has been some want *of prayer* or prudence, and some yielding to

sloth, or tampering with temptation: and any of these causes of heartlessness are reasons for deep shame and humiliation, but not for *despair*. Despair can only make all that is bad worse, and all that is discouraging desperate; because its direct tendency is to harden the heart.

But whilst it is true that bad frames of spirit are never wholly unconnected with remissness of some kind, it is equally true that both they and their practical causes are connected with some misapprehension of the Gospel itself. There has been something *doctrinal* forgotten, or mistaken, or overlooked, as well as something *practical* neglected, whenever lukewarmness or disrelish takes possession of the heart. Either the *object* of faith, or the *law* of faith, is in some degree lost sight of or misunderstood, when the followers of the Lamb are heartless and formal. This is self-evident, because it is impossible for any man to believe that he himself is redeemed by the blood of Christ, and thus made a child of *God, and* yet remain *unfeeling* towards God *and the* Lamb. Accordingly, so long as we

venture to cherish the fond hope that we are "accepted in the beloved," we are not unfeeling in heart, nor formal in obedience. It is when we forget or doubt that we are "justified by faith," that we cease to have "peace with God," and sink into heartlessness in his service; and therefore the grand evangelical fact, that his "righteousness is *upon all* that believe," should never be forgotten or doubted by any one who is relying on Christ for a holy salvation. It is the *duty* as well as the privilege, of all who have committed their souls to Christ, to believe that they *are* justified by believing on Him; because, in no other way can they ever obtain the joy of salvation. In fact, there is no other way; for, whatever the Holy Spirit do in producing that joy, he does it by opening up this revealed truth to the mind, and enabling the soul to believe it on its own behalf. And this belief, although not essential to *acceptance* with God, is essential to "peace with God," and to the maintenance of a feeling heart in his service; for no one can feel aright in all things, who does

not believe aright in all those things which "belong to our peace."

If, therefore, you never understood clearly this part of the Gospel, nor saw, in the *handwriting* of God, your own warrant to regard yourself as a child of God, it is no wonder that your best frames and feelings have not been lasting. How could they last under the weakening and wasting influence of suspense? What was there to maintain them in lively exercise, whilst you could not lay your hand upon the written promise of your own salvation? Seeing the *possibility* of being saved, is, indeed, "great sight," which may well awaken whole trains of sweet and solemn feelings in the bosom of a trembling sinner; but these cannot last long in their *sweetness*, unless he see, too, the *probability* of being saved. Even the *desire* of salvation, which is, perhaps, the most powerful feeling of a serious mind, must lose much of its power, if it can lay hold on nothing stronger than a "peradventure" to gratify it. The soul craves for *more—the* conscience needs more than a

may be to satisfy them. Accordingly, if they are not satisfied, they soon fall asleep again, or return to their old portion.

Here, then, is one great cause of the decline of spiritual relish;—the spiritual appetite, when hungering and thirsting for salvation, is not taken direct to the Gospel for satisfaction, but tantalized by mere peradventures. Indeed, even *prayer* itself fails to keep up a happy frame of mind, when the mind has nothing else to look to but the bare probability of an eventual answer. Accordingly, if you have been doing nothing more than praying for salvation, it is really no wonder that your enjoyment has been both small and unsteady. Not, indeed, that you have prayed too much; that is impossible: but because you have *believed* too little. God answers prayer by blessing his own WORD to the soul; and therefore it is as necessary to "search the Scriptures," as it is to cry for mercy. But if, instead of combining with prayer the study of the Gospel, that you might thus understand the salvation you have been seeking, you have gone on *expecting* that the pardon, and peace, and

joy, which you wanted, would be infused, in some mysterious way, into your heart,—your disappointment is a matter of course; for you did not take God's plan of succeeding, and the consequence is—the darkness and deadness which you complain of. In fact, confining the pursuit of salvation to prayer alone, is almost enough to bring prayer itself to a speedy and final end; for no man will persist long in fervent prayer, if, after many strong cries and tears, he find himself as far off as ever from hope and peace. He may not throw off the habit of it; but it will gradually fall off, if he gain nothing by it. Nor is this all the bad effect of disuniting *faith* from prayer: the man who, after much prayer for pardon and peace, finds no sense, no symptom, of either in his mind, is strongly tempted to abandon the pursuit as hopeless, and to suspect that God has singled him out as an *exception* to the rule, that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." And when this dark suspicion sets in upon *his mind*, it soon gives birth to still darker *thoughts* and feelings. And even when dis-

appointment does not occasion such horrid suspicions, it wears out the spirit of prayer, and weighs down all the best feelings of the heart. The sad reflection, "I obtain no answers to my prayers, and find no enjoyment in them now!" almost cuts the cords which first bound the soul to "the horns of the altar." And when such, or indeed any, considerations alienate the soul from secret devotion, they soon alter all its gracious feelings and habits.

Now it is thus, chiefly, that matters go wrong in the heart of the serious: they miss enjoyment by overlooking part of the Gospel, and thus lose much of their first love and liveliness. Other oversights concur, indeed, with this one, in producing and prolonging a low state of piety in the soul; and nothing can restore the soul to spiritual health, which does not correct these practical oversights, and lead to watchfulness and diligence. Nothing, however, can restore the soul to the joy of salvation, or to the power of godliness, but the Holy Spirit, by leading you "into all truth;" for, until you have a personal hold *upon the* great salvation, it cannot have a

permanent influence upon your heart. N such a hold of it you have either not obtai or you have lost it; and, whichever be case, there is only one way of obtaining i namely, by the *belief* of all the truth. Wa fulness, without believing, will not make heart happy, nor "right with God: pra without believing, will not restore the jo salvation. They may produce a state mind and character, so devout, and hum and upright, that, by reasoning from effect *causes*, you may venture to conclude that y salvation is begun, and thus get hold of i inference. It was thus, most likely, that acquired your first hope and joy of salvat the loss of which you now deplore. You felt as you had never done before, and fo such a change of heart and habits taking p in you, and were conscious of such a will ness to be indebted and devoted to Saviour,—that you could hardly doubt reality of your conversion. Accordin from thus seeing and feeling the work of *Spirit within* you, you ventured to concl *that the work* of Christ was for you. Be

you thought that the Holy Spirit had "quickened" you, you hoped that the Saviour had "died for" you; and because certain marks of effectual calling were showing themselves in your heart and life, you ventured to regard them as some evidence of being "called according to the purpose" of God.

It was, perhaps, somewhat in this way, that you obtained whatever hold of salvation you got for yourself at first; and, could you see all those marks of grace about yourself again, you would feel warranted and encouraged to take down your harp from the willows, and sing again the New Song: but, as some of these marks are almost gone, and all of them more or less decayed, you dare not sing as in the days of old, nor even hope as formerly. But now, if this really be a true copy of your past and present views and feelings, does it not occur to you, on looking at the copy, that you have, all along, had but *confused* ideas of the Gospel? You seem, indeed, to have believed it cordially as far as you understood it; but it does not seem that you ever studied *it half so* much as you did the frames of your

own mind. You must have looked chiefly into, and at, *yourself*, for a warrant to hope in Christ. Do consider this fact? According to your own account of the matter, you have, since you began to think seriously, been much in the habit of marking the workings of your own mind, and the meltings of your heart; and when you found them of a holy and humble character, you began to think that you were then warranted, and almost welcome, to hope in Christ for your own salvation: but, now that you feel less spiritual and contrite, you are afraid to hope.

Now really, if this be the real state of the case with you, you have misunderstood the Gospel *more* than I have hitherto supposed you to have done. For do you not see, that, in all your reasonings from *effects* to *causes*, your own feelings, and not God's invitations, have been made your chief warrant for hoping in Christ. This is self-evident, seeing that, now your tenderness of feeling is gone, you are afraid to hope;—a plain proof that you *have* studied your own heart far more than the *word* of God. What He says concerning the

ground and warrant of hope has had less of your attention than what you *felt* towards religion in general. Now, although you did not, and, indeed, could not, feel too much, you have made a wrong use of your best feelings, in thus making them your chief encouragement in hoping for salvation; for they are no part of the ground of hope, nor, in themselves, of its warrant. "BEHOLD *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,*" is both the only ground and warrant of hope which the Scriptures contain. Nor is any thing more necessary; for as the blood of the Lamb answers all the demands of the law, so the word of the Lamb warrants all who are looking to Him alone for acceptance with God, to believe that they *are* accepted. This is the Gospel! "He that believeth, is justified from all things." "He that believeth, *hath* eternal life." If, therefore, you are conscious that, notwithstanding all your mistakes and relapses, your real design was and is to rely upon Christ alone, that you might become like Christ; you too are warranted, by *the direct* authority of God, to believe that

you are a partaker of that salvation which you were, just now, afraid to hope for. And if you are astonished to find the matter brought to this much desired, but unexpected issue, do remember that it is only saying, in other words, that eternal life is "the free gift of God" to them who believe in Christ. Consider these things, and they will soon restore all your best feelings, and place them upon a firmer basis than ever they stood on before.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. XI.

CAUSES OF BACKSLIDING.

One great cause of backsliding is the *uncertainty* which many of the serious allow to rest upon the question of their own faith in Christ. They never were *sure* that they were believers. They wished to be so—tried to be so—and hoped that, eventually, they should prove to be so. This may be your case. You were quite sure, when you began to follow Christ, that a great change had taken place in your heart and habits, and in your views and feelings;—so great, that you could not but regard it, then, as the beginning of that "good work" which God has promised to carry on. Accordingly, under this sweet persuasion, you *began to* act as a believer, and to apply to

yourself all the *commands* which are enjoined upon believers. Thus, in reference to *duty*, you cast in your lot with the people of God, and willingly came under all their peculiar obligations; and the readiness with which you did so, at that time, was no small proof to yourself, and others, that you were the subject of a divine change. You were even glad to find that you were no longer unwilling to follow holiness, nor averse to devotion. You wondered and wept that you had ever neglected them—and adored the grace which had put an end to that criminal negligence. Accordingly you often felt sure that you could never relapse into your old state of mind: the bare idea of going back from the "narrow way" into the "broad way" again was abhorrent to you. You could not believe that it was possible, after all that you had seen and felt, to forsake the fountain of living waters, and return to the broken cisterns of sin or folly. But you have done so, and left both your "first love," and your "first works." You are now a *backslider, and* feel and confess that you are so.

Many causes, of course, concurred in pro-

ducing this backsliding; and all the *moral* causes of it are well known to yourself. You can see, at a glance, how it began in the neglect of secret prayer; and how it went on by the neglect of self-examination; and how it settled into a kind of apostacy of heart from God and godliness, by an undue attention to the world, or by tampering with forbidden things. Your heart condemns you,—and "*God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things!*" The case, however, although both lamentable and criminal, is not hopeless. You have, indeed, almost given up God; but God has not given up you; so that there is still hope in Israel concerning this thing! For it is just as true that God "heals backslidings," as that he pardons sins;—just as true that the backslider is welcome to return to Christ, as that any sinner is welcome to come to him. He who restored Peter will not reject you, when you seek him with all your heart. The Saviour is, in fact, *more* unwilling to give you up finally, than you are to be given up by him.

Such being the real state of the case, the

first question is, of course, How must you return? Now there is not one way for UNBELIEVERS to *come* to God, and another for BACKSLIDERS to *return* to God; but the way in which you came, is the only way in which you can return. Both unbelievers and backsliders have "access to God," only "by the blood of Christ;" but, in that way, whosoever cometh, or returneth, he will in no wise cast out. In a word, backsliders can only be restored in the same way that sinners are justified,—by *believing* in Christ for salvation.

Now, if you intend to try again this way of access to God, see to it, I beseech you, that the question of your believing is not left in the doubtful state in which you allowed it to remain, when you first attempted to believe with the heart; for if you leave it unsettled, or uncertain, you will soon backslide again. You cannot go on well in the ways of God, until you *know* that you are a believer. All your former backslidings arose, more or less, out of your former uncertainty on this point. They *had, indeed,* other and worse causes, but this, *too,* was a cause. And in this way:—not

being sure that you were a believer, you were not, and could not be, sure that you had any *right* to the comfort of the great and precious promises. Accordingly you were afraid, even in your best days, to apply them freely to yourself. I mean, you did not, and durst not, even then, apply the promises to your own case, as you applied the *laws* of the Gospel. You were quite sure that it was your bounden duty to regard all the commandments of God as the rule of your life; but you were not sure that it was your *privilege* to regard all the promises of God as the portion of your soul. You pleaded, indeed, the promises in the name of Christ, and hoped that God would fulfil them in your experience; but you often doubted whether he would do so, and felt that you had no certain hold on Him or them. The consequence of all this was, that the Gospel had not a firm hold upon you; and therefore, when temptation came, you were not fully prepared to resist it. You could not say, "I am a child of God, and must not give way to it—an heir of salvation, and need not *be vanquished* by it." Temptation, therefore,

had nothing to contend with, but a sense of duty and interest; and this it overcame.

It is of immense importance to understand this point clearly. You were quite sincere, and not unhappy, when you began to follow Christ: salvation was your supreme object; and the hope of obtaining it, sooner or later, was the joy of your heart.

You did not, however, expect to obtain it soon; but laid your account with years, perhaps, of diligence, before you could make your calling and election sure. And, at first, you were not unwilling to pursue the assurance of salvation at this expense of diligence. You thought, and rightly too, that the witness and seal of the Spirit would amply repay all the pains taken to obtain them. However, before they *could* come, you had begun to go astray. Neither your diligence nor delight lasted long. They did not, indeed, pass away so rapidly as the early cloud, or the morning dew; but they did pass away sooner than you could have imagined it possible for them. *Now* remember, and mark,—just in *proportion* as your *delight* in the ways of God

declined, your *diligence* abated; and, exactly as both declined, your doubts of the reality of your *conversion* multiplied. Accordingly it was not as a child of God—not as a believer—not even in the character of a convert,—that you departed from God: but, in leaving Him, you suspected that you had never belonged to him. You, most likely, even palliated your backslidings to yourself, by the consideration that you had either never avowed yourself to be a true convert, or had not been sure of it in your own mind. Your backsliding did not, therefore, appear to you as the departure of a *child* from a father, but of a *servant* from a master. You felt, indeed, that you were risking your soul more than ever; but you felt, too, that it had never been safe. Thus, you had not all, nor the best, motives of a *conscious* believer, to restrain you. You had, indeed, motives which *ought* to have restrained you, and which *would* have done so, if they had been kept stedfastly in view; and it is both your sin and shame, that you lost sight of them: but still, you had not that magnetic *motive* which confirmed the souls of the first

disciples,—"*We love him because he first loved us.*" Any love you had to the Saviour arose either from the consideration of his general love to the world, or from the hope that he might, one day, manifest his love to you; and, as the manifestation which you looked for did not come, the diligence which you began with did not go on.

Now, if this were the real state of the matter in your case, thus, it is evident, it will be again, unless you get under the influence of the *peculiar*, as well as the common, motives which bind the soul to Christ and holiness. In returning to God, therefore, see to it—that it is by believing in Christ that you may "*be justified by the faith of Christ.*" Your first approaches to the Saviour came short of this. "The end" of whatever faith you exercised then, was the remote, not the immediate, salvation of your soul; whereas you are warranted, and welcome, immediately upon committing your soul to Christ for a holy salvation, to believe that you "shall be saved;" for God *accepts* at once, and Christ keeps for ever, all *who believe* with the heart unto righteousness.

Credit this, therefore, in your own case; and thus, although future backsliding will not be rendered impossible, it will be far less likely to occur.

There is, however, a class of backsliders who never went so far, either in believing or obeying the Gospel, as in the case just stated. They knew something of the way of salvation, and, for a time, felt so much of its value that they could not neglect secret prayer, nor pray without tears. They were often quite overcome, both in their closets and in the sanctuary, with sweet or solemn impressions of divine and eternal things. Their hearts melted or warmed whenever they pondered on the great salvation. But now, all this holy susceptibility and deep feeling is lost, and, with it, all the hope which it gave rise to. Accordingly, such persons, on looking back to their former state of mind, and contrasting it with the present, feel that they are backsliders in heart and in life. The consciousness of this melancholy fact overwhelms them at times; but when they think of returning to the Fountain of living waters, the want of their old

feelings of love and relish discourages them. Hence the language of some is, "O that it were with me as in months past! but I can neither feel nor pray now as I did then, and, therefore, I dare not hope. My soul no longer prospers, and therefore I can take no comfort from the promises. I have lost my first love, and now I can get no hold upon Christ for myself. I have departed from God, and God has, in anger, hid his face from me!"

Now this is certainly a deplorable case; and whoever would treat it harshly has not the spirit of Christ. The sincerity and humility of the confession demand both respect and tenderness. There are, however, *mistakes* mixed up with it, which require to be corrected, even if some pain be incurred by the correction of them.

Now, when you say "that God has hid his face from you in anger," this implies that you once saw it in *love*, and enjoyed the light of his countenance. But is this really *true?* Is it certain that what you once enjoyed was the *divine* presence shining on your soul? It is *quite certain* that you enjoyed something,

which was both pleasing and profitable to you at the time: of that there can be no doubt, seeing the memory of those happy moments is so dear to you, and the loss of them so deeply deplored by you. It is not, therefore, with any view of throwing discredit on your word, that I ask, Is it the *fact*, that God ever manifested himself to your soul as your Father and portion? Every thing is not the divine presence which is called so. What you felt then may appear, when compared with your present darkness, the light of God's countenance; but you did not, perhaps, think it so then. Remember what was your opinion of that joy, when it was full, and whilst it lasted! Were you then sure that you had obtained salvation—sure that you were accepted in the Beloved—sure that you were passed from death to life? Did not your joy arise rather from a persuasion that you were in a *fair way* for finding mercy at last? Were you not quite as much pleased with your own good feelings and intentions, as with the Gospel? Was it not, chiefly, because you felt as *you did*, that you *hoped* as you did then?

Remember, as minutely as you can, the precise character of your first love! I am not attempting to discredit its sincerity, but to ascertain how far it was influenced by faith in the atonement. What I want to get at in your case, is, the degree in which your hopes and happiness arose from believing views of the blood of Christ. Now, you did not overlook that great atonement, nor presume to hope apart from its merits. In one sense, it was your only and final plea at the mercy-seat: but did you, even in your best days, think it a *sufficient* plea? When you pleaded it most fervently, did you feel it to be *enough* in itself, and by itself, to obtain for you acceptance with God? Did you see nothing between you and hell, but the cross?—and see that to be quite enough to save you from the wrath to come? Did you really believe, or perceive, that nothing but *faith* was necessary in order to warrant hope? Did it ever occur to you, even when your faith was strongest, *that* your faith had saved you? Or, is it not *the fact, that* you attached far more importance to your feelings than to your faith? Be

honest!—your believing went for little in your own estimation. You thought it the *least* part of your piety; and that, not because it was weak, but because you had very little faith in the use of faith itself, or did not regard your own believing as faith. What you believed, was the last thing you thought of, when examining the reality of your religion: you laid the chief stress upon your tears, prayers, and holy desires, and hardly allowed any weight to your believing. This is self-evident; for you *still* believe all that you did then, and still think your belief of the Gospel of no consequence or real use. It gives you no comfort now, and therefore it was not *it* which comforted you then.

Surely all this forces upon you the suspicion, if not the conviction, that whatever you felt, even in your best days, you did not *understand* the way of salvation by faith well. For, do you not see, that if the atonement had really been the sole ground of your hope then, and if faith in it had been your hold of it, you could hope still, because you believe still all *that* you did then? You are changed for the

worse in many respects, but your believing goes on as formerly. I mean—you *disbelieve* none of the truths which you believed then. You have as much faith in the *truth* of the Gospel as ever; but, having less feeling, you attach no importance to it. You never laid much stress upon your believing, and now you think it of no use whatever.

The object of these remarks is, to convince you, that however sincere, warm, or pleasing, your former religious feelings were, you were, all along, very imperfectly acquainted with the way of salvation; indeed, so ignorant of it, that if all these feelings were restored in your heart, they would not prove you to be a believer. The loss of them proves that you are a backslider from much that was good and promising; but the revival of them, in all their original tenderness, would not constitute you a child of God: for sinners are made "the sons of God, by faith in Christ Jesus;" whereas, in your creed, this grand principle of the Gospel has been overlooked or misunderstood. Or, if you have talked of salvation *by faith*, you must have meant, by faith, some-

thing more than the hearty belief of the truth concerning the person and work of Christ. Depend on it, therefore, that you are not, and never have been, so *humble* as you imagine; for had you seen or believed that there was nothing but the blood of the Lamb between you and perishing, you must have seen too, that the only way of escape is by trusting to that blood. Well—it is open to your confidence still; and, if you are persuaded of the truth of its freeness and efficacy, why not trust in it at once?

Many other causes of backsliding might be (perhaps ought to have been) enumerated; but the *moral* causes of it are so abundantly explained in other works, that it seemed better to confine this chapter to those mistakes, and to that uncertainty upon the subject of a personal interest in Christ, which give such power to temptation, by leaving the mind unsatisfied, and unfortified with the hope of salvation.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

No. XII.

SANCTIFIED AFFLICTIONS.

The perplexity of the serious is often increased, for a time, by their trials or calamities. And in this way: it seems hard, when we are willing and trying to do well in the service of God, to be hindered by an unusual weight of affliction. Such a hindrance we did not look for; but almost calculated that *providence*, as well as grace, would smile upon us when we became the decided followers of the Lamb. We may not, indeed, have ventured to say so, in words, to ourselves; but it was almost an understood thing, and taken for granted by us, that we should be in less *danger* than formerly. We intended to do *so well*, and to be so devoted to God, that it

seemed unlikely that he would allow any thing to befall us, which was likely to hinder or unhinge us: but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts on this point. He has allowed both trials and calamities to come upon us; and these may be only "the beginning of sorrows."

But this, although painful, should not *surprise* us; we had no warrant to calculate upon exemption from tribulation. In fact, we ought to have laid our account with passing through "many tribulations," from the time we began to walk in "the narrow way" to heaven. It was "*written*," that we should have to do so: it was obvious that all who had preceded us in the way to Zion, had done so. If, therefore, we flattered ourselves, in the face of all divine testimony and of all human experience, the flattery must have been almost wilful, and altogether inexcusable. "But no *strange* thing has befallen" us, however much we may be startled or staggered by our afflictions. We may see the same crosses on the shoulders of many of our brethren; yea, and upon many who are strangers to God and godliness, and *who* have thus no resource in the day of cala-

mity. Now if it be so hard to bear up under heavy trials, notwithstanding all that *we* know of the wisdom of God, and of the tenderness of the Saviour, how intolerable it must be to suffer without hope!

This is a view of our trials, which we ought never to lose sight of. They might have been sent whilst we were strangers to prayer and faith; and, had they come before we fled to Christ, they might have hurried us on to desperation, or hardened our hearts against the Gospel! Weigh this solemn fact. We should not have escaped from all affliction, nor have had any security against our present sufferings, by continuing in "the broad way:" they might have overtaken us there; or, what is worse, God might have *cursed* us, by giving us our good things in this life. Now, if the mighty hand of God had struck us down whilst we were afar off from him, and unwilling to draw nigh to him, the consequences might have been fatal; for, if we almost sink now, although we can cast our burden on the Lord, we must have been overwhelmed, if that burden had been laid upon us before we knew the

Lord. And if, at times, it almost alienate some of our feelings from him, by its weight; how easily might it have set all the heart against him, whilst our hearts were unregenerate! This is not such an unusual effect of severe troubles as you may imagine. We, indeed, see many brought to their "right mind" by affliction; and therefore we are apt to suppose that the natural tendency of it is to awaken the careless, and soften the obdurate; but whenever affliction does so, it is not by its *natural* influence, but because it is overruled for good, by grace. Accordingly in those circles of life where the means of grace are neglected, and the Gospel unknown, the usual effect of trouble is to harden the heart against God, or to produce utter recklessness. There are, indeed, some pleasing exceptions to this melancholy fact, which occur, but they are very few; and no wonder. How could it, in the nature of things, be otherwise? Affliction is well calculated to enforce whatever a man *knows* of God and salvation; but, if he have grown up ignorant of the things which belong to his "peace," it cannot *inform*

him of these things. Accordingly, where they are not known beforehand, there is nothing in the mind to work upon, but its own powers and passions, and these are rather irritated than subdued by the rod. Had, therefore, our severest trials come upon us whilst we were ignorant, and out of the way, the probability is, that they would have seared our conscience, and thus sealed our ruin.

Another reconciling consideration is—that our *former* trials have been positively useful to us. Our present affliction is not the first; we have had the cup at our lips before; and if it be bitterer than before, there is still no *poison* in it. Hitherto it has proved salutary in every instance. Accordingly we can trace an intimate connexion between certain trials and the formation of our religious character: they gave power and glory to our views of salvation and eternity, and brought our principles to the test; and assisted in breaking up bad habits, and in bringing down bad tempers; for before we were afflicted we "went *astray*." Upon our *devotional* character, *especially*, they have had a mighty influence. The

spirit of prayer might almost be said to have begun with the beginning of our sorrows; we came so near to God, and unbosomed and unburdened our souls so fully to him, when his hand was first lifted up against us. We saw the "needs be" for the rod then, and acknowledged that in faithfulness he had afflicted us. Accordingly, on looking back to the devotional exercises of that time, and to the devotional habits which grew out of them, we can truly say with David, "It was good for me that I was afflicted." Now, with all this experience, why not expect similar good from your present afflictions? They are heavier—but they are from the same hand, and from the same heart too; and therefore for the same gracious purpose.

"But they have not the same influence," some may say; "this stroke of the rod has quite stunned me. My spirit is so overwhelmed within me, and my mind so unhinged, that I cannot pray, nor meditate, nor do any thing aright. My former troubles endeared the mercy-seat and the means of grace, and seemed *to bring* with them the strength and the

consolation required for bearing them well; but this calamity has swept, like a whirlwind, all my best principles and feelings before it. Nothing rises in my heart but dark and horrid thoughts; and when I try to pray them down, they rise more fiercely!"

This is, indeed, a deplorable case; but still, it is only the natural effect of the first pressure of heavy woes: they unsettle and upset the mind for a time, and we ourselves aggravate their pressure by rash conclusions. One rash conclusion, which we are prone to draw, is,—that we never can *get over* such a trial, nor be *ourselves* again. We feel sure of this, and say that it is impossible ever to surmount it, or to be happy again.

Perhaps this is your opinion of your own case. It is, however, a conclusion utterly unwarranted by Scripture or experience. Others have recovered from strokes of Providence equally stunning. Asaph was quite as much overwhelmed as you are. Besides, you are not prepared, whatever you may think at present, to *abide* by your own conclusion. It is not *drawn* from *all* the facts of the case. You are

looking only to "the things which are seen, and temporal," and overlooking "the things which are unseen, and eternal," when you say that all is over in your case. For surely you have not made up your mind to brave and bear eternal separation from God and the Lamb! Surely you are not willing to abandon your *soul* to perdition, because your temporal interests are gone to wreck! You cannot look a ruined eternity in the face, and recklessly await its coming! Such horrid thoughts may, indeed, flash across your agitated spirit for a moment; but you dare not, cannot, dwell upon them. Even if you indulge them for a moment, there is a *lurking* hope that it will not come to this: and even when you are most desperate, you are not prepared to affirm that God *cannot* bring you out of these deep waters.

Consider this; you are *not* prepared to throw your precious and immortal soul into the general wreck of your happiness. There is enough lost, without losing *that* too! Besides, you do not believe yourself, when you try to say to *yourself*, that all hope is for ever gone. Oh

no! you may not see how you can be restored, but you know that restoration is not impossible. You dare not go the length of maintaining that God is your implacable and eternal enemy. You may say, "What can I think, seeing God has allowed all this to come upon me? Is not my calamity a token, not only of his anger and wrath, but of his *hatred?*" No! for grievous as it is, it is less than Job's; and in his there was no hatred at all. Besides, you once thought, and believed, that God was your *friend*. "Ah," you say, "it is the recollection of that hope which aggravates all my misery. I had begun to feel as a child, and to act as a child, towards the God of salvation; and I seemed, to myself, likely to do well in his service, until this came upon me." Indeed! upon what *grounds* did you then rest the hope of your sonship? Perhaps these grounds remain as open and firm as ever;—if they were scriptural grounds, they actually do. If, however, you took up the hope of *salvation* from the consideration that Providence was smiling on you; and thought God *your* Father, because your temporal lot pleased

you, you were risking your soul in a refuge of lies; and if so, your calamity is sent in *mercy*, to drive you for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel. But if you say, "It was not wanted for that; all my hope of salvation and sonship was built, not on any thing in my temporal lot, or in my moral character, but wholly on the Rock of Ages; Christ was all and all as the ground of my hopes:" if so, have you not known—have you not heard, that Jesus Christ is "*the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?*" Then all the grounds of your hope *do* remain the same as ever. The foundation standeth sure, whatever else is fallen.

Now the matter comes to a point; for if it be the fact, that your hopes were not founded on, nor influenced by, the *providential* tokens of divine favour in your lot, but were derived solely from the person and work of Christ,—the changes in your lot ought not to change hope into despair, seeing the foundation of hope is unchanged. But you say, "I am sadly changed to the worse." In what? You wonder at this question, and are ready to say,

"In every thing." Now you should, of course, know best; but, at present, you are neither calm nor collected, and therefore it may be that you judge too rashly. There is, however, no doubt, a melancholy change in the frame of your mind, and in your devotional habits; but still, these are not *every thing* in religion: they are important and necessary things; but they are not the whole of piety, nor yet the vital principle of it. Faith in Christ is the grand bond of union between the soul and God; and if that bond be not broken, your soul may soon return to its quiet rest;—"cast down," indeed, "but not destroyed; perplexed, but not in despair." But you say, "My faith is gone, as well as my hope; they perished together, in the day of my calamity." Indeed! how could that be? Your calamity made a sad alteration in you; but it did not *alter* the Saviour, nor the Gospel, nor the promises of God to believers. Perhaps it did not alter *your* leading views or convictions in regard to the person and work of Christ. If *not, your faith* is not clean gone yet. Examine the matter calmly; you were once fully

persuaded of the truth, and suitableness, and value of the Gospel.—Is this persuasion changed? Is there any part of the divine testimony concerning Christ, which you now disbelieve? Do you think *less* of the Saviour than formerly? He is not, of course, so precious in your estimation as he was, when you could look up to him as your *own* Saviour; but you still believe him to be the only Saviour. In regard to all but yourself, you are fully persuaded that he is able to save to the very uttermost. How then can you say, that your faith is utterly perished? Is there no faith in a firm belief of all the truth concerning the Saviour? If not, what do you *mean* by faith?

Perhaps you never attached much importance to the cordial belief of the truth itself; but have, hitherto, regarded nothing as faith, but the *reliance* which you placed on Christ for your own salvation; and therefore, as that reliance is shaken to its very centre at present, you, of course, conclude that you have no faith. Now it is certainly very useless to believe the truth concerning the Saviour, without trusting in him for salvation. It is, how-

ever, the belief of the truth concerning Him, which is the *warrant* for trusting in Him. You may say, "I cannot trust—cannot rely, now; God seems to debar me, by visible tokens of his anger." Now, really, this is a rash interpretation of his dealings. You cannot lay your hand upon one text of Scripture, which says that such judgments as yours are fatal, or final. The whole tenour of Scripture stamps them as being *fatherly* chastisements, inflicted in love, not in hatred. And as to the assertion, that you can no longer venture to rely on Christ for yourself, it is equally unfounded. You, of course, believe and feel it to be true; but it is not less false, in itself, on that account. The Spirit of God is just as able to enable you to trust in Christ now, as when he first won your confidence to Him; and, for any thing that appears to the contrary, just as *willing* as ever. He is, however, the Spirit of truth, and therefore works by the truth; and that truth which you require to see, in order to the renewal of your trust *in Christ*, is—that you are warranted and welcome to rely on Him for your own salvation,

upon the single ground of still *believing* what God has testified concerning him. Now, that testimony you do believe with the heart still, unhinged and overwhelmed as your heart is! You have lost your hold upon hope and peace, during this stormy and dark day; but you have not lost hold of the truth of the Gospel. Well, on this ground it is both your privilege and your duty to take up hope again. Now, if you see this clearly, the lesson is worth all that you have suffered in order to learn it.

Assuming, therefore, that you now see how your faith in Christ has secured your interest in Christ, and maintained it throughout all the vicissitudes of your case, what do you think of your trials, when you view them in this light? Your *soul* is still safe; God is still your friend; the Saviour has not forgotten you; the Spirit has not forsaken you;—whatever you have lost or suffered. Is not this an *up-making* portion? Does not all this balance the weight of affliction, and even lighten it? You may now calculate upon grace to help, and on strength to sustain you. "*Humble*" yourself under the mighty hand of

God, and he will exalt you in due season. This hot furnace was the fiery trial of your *faith*, as well as your patience; and, accordingly, it has purified your faith from much of its dross, and increased its value in your own estimation. And is it not amazing to you to see the glorious principle of salvation by faith, like a rainbow, spanning and brightening the dark clouds of your calamity! Can you ever cease to wonder at this wonder? *Saved by faith!* Now you can do and endure, as seeing Him who is INVISIBLE.

No. XIII.

EXPERIMENTAL MAXIMS.

"*Hold the mystery of Faith in a pure conscience.*" In nothing else can it be held with comfort or effect. When a bad conscience gets between the mind and the Gospel, it soon brings on an almost total eclipse upon both, until the Gospel no longer appears what it really is, and the mind can no longer apply it as formerly. How naturally and inevitably this should be the effect of a bad conscience, you may judge from the fact—that you have found it *difficult* to get hold, and to keep hold, of the principle of salvation by faith, notwithstanding all your efforts to maintain a good conscience towards God and man. Your conscience was, perhaps, never more tender or

watchful than during your inquiries into this principle; and if, in this state of mind, you have at one time been afraid to call your believing, faith; and at another time afraid to conclude that you were justified;—it is obvious that a bad conscience must render such conclusions impossible, upon scriptural or rational grounds. The sober and solemn fact is, that the comforts of the Gospel are in the hands of the Holy Spirit; and therefore, when they are not employed for holy purposes, he withholds them, or, what is worse, leaves the mind to the infatuation of crying "Peace," when there is no peace. However clearly, therefore, you may now see the way of your own salvation by faith, be sure of this,—that as soon as you cease to strive to maintain a good conscience towards God and man, your hold upon the Gospel will begin to relax, and continue to lessen, until you sink into greater perplexity than ever. A good hope cannot be held in a bad conscience.

"LET *the peace of God rule in your hearts.*" Yes, *let* it! Some do not allow it to rule or *rest in* their hearts. "We have peace with

God," when the Holy Spirit enables us to see and believe that we are "justified by faith:" but this way of arriving at, and retaining, peace of conscience, is so different from all our natural, and from the *spirit* of many of our acquired, ideas, that we are prone to flinch from it, or to be afraid of it; and thus we unsettle that peace which springs from believing. We talk, indeed, of "living a life of faith;" but, in general, this is made to include almost every thing but faith itself. Nor is this the only way in which peace with God is disturbed and lost: it comes into the heart by believing; but it comes to "*rule*" in the heart; and, therefore, if it be not allowed to sway its sceptre over our habits and tempers, it will not shed its sweet influences over our hopes. Oh, charge all that is within you, to *let it rule* over you!

"*Pray always with all prayer and supplication.*" If you know yourself to be a believer, you have not, of course, to pray for faith itself, but for the increase and the continuance of it; nor for justification itself, but for the habitual sense of it, and for the pardon of daily sins; nor for sonship itself, but for the spirit of

adoption; nor for the new birth itself, but for the progress and perfection of regeneration: but what a field—what occasion—for frequent and fervent prayer is thus before you! And you will require to pray, until your spirit be disembodied for praise. Without prayer, you cannot maintain a good conscience: without prayer, you cannot keep before your mind the principles or the facts of the Gospel, which have relieved you: without prayer, the spirit of adoption will evaporate as morning dew: without prayer, the joints and sinews of your moral and religious character will relax and fail. You never can realize as your *Father*, the God you are reluctant to commune with. You may *call* him so before others; but you will be unable to *think* him so in your own mind.

"*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" Some, when they discover the perfect simplicity of the Gospel, and see clearly that the cordial belief of it is faith, and that faith itself settles the question of acceptance with God,—have no patience with those who are groping their way to these great principles,

and no respect for those who happen to state them less clearly. Penitents are thus treated with harshness; and preachers, who are as intent as any on making Christ all and all in salvation, are branded as legalists and enemies of the Cross. Now, to say the least of such conduct, it is really *despicable!* How can such persons forget the slowness of their own hearts to apprehend and believe the whole of the Gospel? Guard against this censorious spirit! You did not see your own way or welcome at once, nor soon, nor easily. And it is more than probable, that one *half* of the patience which you have required in your own case, will be quite sufficient to bring these humble inquirers into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For they are not *unbelievers,* because unable yet to see how faith itself unites the soul to Christ. In general, they believe with the heart all the truth with which God has connected the promise of salvation; so that, on your own principles, they are safe, without knowing that they are so. "*Strengthen,*" therefore, instead of staggering, *them.*

"*Be ye followers of God as dear children.*" Much, both of your personal comfort and relative usefulness, depends on acting upon this principle. The theoretic or logical conclusion that you are a child of God, because you believe in Christ, will not last long, if you cease to follow the Lord fully. It is, however, equally true that you will not long follow him fully, if you lose sight of this conclusion.—He who would follow as a child of God, must *believe* that he is a child of God. Now, if you believe this in your own case, do speak and act agreeably to your relationship. I do not mean, of course, that you should boast of, or obtrude on others, the hope of your sonship; but you may, you ought, to appear in your real character. By doing so habitually, you will feel more and more bound to cultivate the image and spirit of a child; and others, seeing not only your good works, but your good hopes also, will feel that religion *gives* the happiness it promises. Whereas when the careless, or the undecided, see nothing *more than practical* godliness in the pious, *and hear* nothing from them but details of

fears, and doubts, and strivings; they are led to argue that religion, however good, is joyless, and that the pious are as uncertain as themselves of salvation. And what else can they think, if you say nothing of your enjoyments? Casting "pearls before swine" is wrong; but, in general, wherever you can speak of your sense of duty with propriety, you may say something of your privileges and prospects too.

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

THE END.

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